

The Tales of Ise

Peter Macmillan

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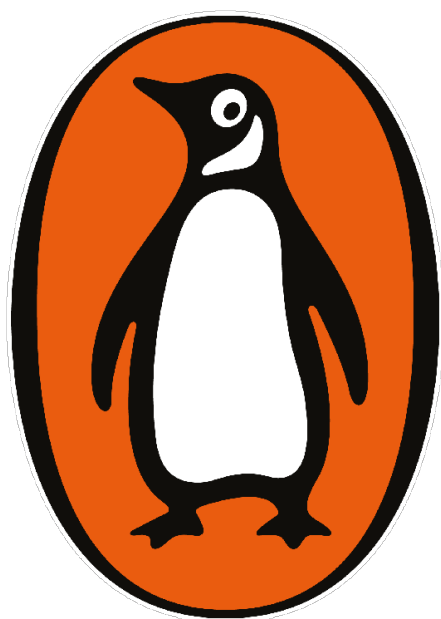


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Tales of Ise



Translated and with a Commentary by
Peter MacMillan

THE TALES OF ISE

Foreword by
DONALD KEENE



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THE TALES OF ISE

PETER MACMILLAN is a translator, poet and artist. His previous translation, *One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each (Hyakunin issyu)*, was awarded the Donald Keene Center Special Prize for the Translation of Japanese Literature, and the 44th Special Cultural Translation Prize from the Japan Society of Translators, both in 2008. He has also published a collection of poetry, *Admiring Fields*, and is active as an artist. His series of prints *Thirty-Six New Views of Mount Fuji* has been widely exhibited in Japan and other countries.

DONALD KEENE taught at Columbia University for many years and is internationally renowned as an interpreter of Japanese literature and culture for the West. He lives in Japan and was the first foreign national to receive the Order of Culture (Bunka Kunsho) from the Japanese government for his contribution to Japanese literature and culture.

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Foreword

The Tales of Ise is one of the most famous works of Japanese literature, and its influence in later times has probably been greater than that of any other work of the Heian period. Although the more than one hundred episodes in the *Tales* are poetic and agreeable to read, seemingly presenting no problems, a huge amount of scholarly research has been devoted over the centuries to elucidating its every particle – the mark of its unusual importance.

The title itself is a mystery. Only two or three of the episodes have any connection with Ise, the site of the great shrine of the Shinto religion, but these few episodes are so striking that they may have caused some editor to name the entire collection of stories after Ise. They relate the love affair between the hero and the high priestess of Ise, a sacred virgin who was kept strictly from the eyes of men. The hero's success in seducing a woman who is all but impossible to approach sets the tone of the work, even in the episodes that do not relate to the hero.

The hero, the ninth-century courtier Ariwara no Narihira, is mentioned by name only once in the entire work; most often, he is simply 'the man'. Many episodes begin with the plain declaration: 'Long ago, there was a man.' If nothing else, this sentence serves to set the events of the episode in the past, a time that was deemed to be far more elegant than the present. Yet the *Tales* was read not merely as the story of a Don Juan who always (or almost always) succeeds in his attempts to win the favour of ladies of the court but as an evocation of an era when beauty and the quest for beauty were the most important elements of life. The poetry in each episode makes it possible for us to believe that such people really inhabited this refined court.

Many poems are attributed to Narihira, but some were added by other poets in the augmented versions of the work. The quality of the poetry is remarkably high, superior even to the poetry in *The Tale of Genji*. Some poems have inspired whole Noh plays and become familiar to every educated Japanese. The work has not been widely read outside Japan because of the lack of translations that are close to the qualities of the original.

The first task of the translator of the *Tales* is to translate the poems

– and, to a lesser extent, the prose – without losing their beauty. A strictly literal translation is impossible because of the great differences between the Japanese and English languages. In the past, some translators of Japanese enclosed words like ‘it’ or ‘the’ in brackets to indicate that they were not in the original, but such translations tended to be boring, if not completely unreadable. Even if one knows every word in one of the poems, its overall meaning may be difficult to understand. Scholars have more or less agreed on the meaning of the words of the poems, but not on their implied or hidden overtones.

Variant texts must also be considered. Of course, translations must be faithful to the original, but faithfulness should be maintained not only in the individual words but also in the meaning of the whole poem, and in order for readers to understand the poet’s intent, it is sometimes necessary to add words that are not in the original.

The great master of translating Japanese (and Chinese) works of literature into English was Arthur Waley (1899–1966). Today, his translations are sometimes criticized by scholars, who point out his mistakes or additions, but his work is in the tradition of the famous translations of the past (such as Edward FitzGerald’s *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*), which certainly move readers more than those that scrupulously follow every word of the original.

Peter MacMillan’s *Tales of Ise*, of the school of Waley, is translated elegantly, as this exquisite work must be, and is on a par with Waley’s translation of *The Tale of Genji* (1925–6). His translations of the poems are particularly successful. And as Waley does in his translations, MacMillan has also made small but successful additions or adaptations. For example, he has given titles to episodes and occasionally uses personification to make the meaning clearer for the reader. However, his readings are extremely accurate and completely faithful to the original. In making the translations, he has made very extensive use of modern Japanese scholarship on the *Tales* (something that Waley could not do, in his *Genji* translation).

Despite the importance and enormous influence of *The Tales of Ise*, it is hardly read or studied any more in the original. MacMillan’s brilliant translation will help to re-establish the fundamental importance of this work of Japanese literature and surely garner a whole new generation of readers. It is the most poetic translation of this work to date, and adds to the treasures of Japanese literature that can now be enjoyed in English translation.

Peter MacMillan is the premier translator of Japanese literature of his generation. His clear and lucid translations make this complex and difficult world accessible to English-language readers and transform our understanding of Japanese poetry.

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March 2016, Tokyo

Introduction

Though written by multiple hands over a long time span, *The Tales of Ise* (hereafter referred to as the *Tales*) is a work of great profundity, at once original, experimental, subversive, filled with wit and humour and, at the same time, a collection of elegance and beauty. Along with *The Tale of Genji*, the *Hyakunin isshu* (One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each) and the *Kokin wakashū* (Collection of *Waka* Ancient and Modern; referred to hereafter as the *Kokinshū*), the *Tales* is one of the four most important works in Japanese classical literature, and knowledge of it is a prerequisite for understanding Japanese cultural and literary history. It is also one of the most enigmatic works in the Japanese canon, and the aim of the introduction, commentary and supplementary material in this edition is to help bring to life more fully the beauty of the *Tales* and the pleasure to be found in reading it.

Constructed as a series of poem tales (*uta monogatari* – see [here](#)), the *Tales* comprises 125 short narratives that function as suitable contexts for the mostly love poems, many of which depict the famous real-life poet Ariwara no Narihira (AD 825–80 – see [here](#)).¹ Narihira is presented as having composed many of the poems himself, and the narratives can be read as examples of how he would have responded in various situations. However, some of the roles he assumes and circumstances in which he finds himself would have been impossible for a man of his elevated status, and we know for a fact that he didn't compose all the poems. One way to read the *Tales*, then, is as a fictionalized, sometimes tongue-in-cheek, portrait of the great lover and poet Narihira.

Another way is to dip in and out of the *Tales*, enjoying the poems in their various settings, and to view the work in much the same way that one would look at a series of *rakuchu rakugaizu* screen paintings. These depict a multitude of separate little scenes of Kyoto and its environs glimpsed through gaps in the clouds. At first the scenes appear to be disconnected until one realizes that they each reveal part of a single unified world – life in the capital. In the same way, the aggregate of the diverse episodes of the *Tales* creates a unified perspective of the cultural mores, aesthetics and the 'way of love' of aristocratic society in the early part of the Heian period (794–1185).

The *Tales* was influenced by a large range of sources: the poetry of the time, mostly the *Kokinshū* anthology; earlier poetry, especially the *Man'yōshū* (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves); and Chinese literature, Buddhism, folk tales and songs.² Composed over a long period, it became a basic text in the *éducation sentimentale* of the Japanese and a fundamental part of the literary education for poets and men and women of learning for a thousand years. Ever since it was written, it has influenced all aspects of art and literature, from *waka* poetry and Noh theatre (see [here](#)) to diaries and fiction. Indeed, without the *Tales* it is difficult to imagine the creation of the greatest novel of Japanese literature, the eleventh-century *Tale of Genji*. Its author, Murasaki Shikibu (970/978–1014/1031), one of Japan's most celebrated writers, refers to one of the *Tales'* authors, Narihira, with the highest respect in her work. In the chapter called 'A Picture Contest', the *Tales* and the no-longer-extant *Tale of Josammi* are compared. Though, in Japanese fashion, no winner is actually proclaimed, the view of Lady Fujitsubo prevails when she declares that Narihira's name must not be maligned.

Over three hundred editions of the *Tales* were issued during the Edo period (1603–1868), nearly one a year, making it an outstanding success and the bestselling book of the era. Unlike the long chapters in *The Tale of Genji*, all the episodes in the *Tales* are short and highly readable, and it was often quoted in poetry, plays and other literature, making it required reading for sophisticated Edoites, who would have been expected to recognize such allusions. The romantic situations described in the *Tales*, and the words and phrases used to describe them, were essential knowledge for poets, and copies were even placed in the trousseaux of brides, as it was considered particularly apt for educating women in the ways of love.

While the influence of the *Tales* on Western literature has yet to be felt, there is one striking exception. The *Tales* had an enormous influence on Noh theatre, not least in its witty use of wordplay and linguistic and thematic association. And one play in particular, *Kakitsubata* (The Iris), based on [Episode 9](#) of the *Tales*, had a huge impact on James Joyce's magnum opus, *Finnegans Wake*. Joyce had read Ezra Pound and Ernest Fenollosa's translation of the play and found in the Noh a confirmation of the possibilities of layered language that would become so central to the novel. As Eileen Kato comments, it is a marvel to see in Joyce's masterpiece how the wanderings of Narihira are transformed and how the Iris spirit who attains enlightenment in *Kakitsubata* 'goes on to achieve Celtic illumination in a new avatar in *Finnegans Wake*'.³

In modern-day Japan, the original is relegated chiefly to academic study, but the *Tales* is still the source of endless inspiration in a large

variety of media, from novels to poetry and even comics (*manga*). There are many contemporary rewritings and adaptations of the *Tales*, and it is also one of the most illustrated literary works in Japanese art history, with scenes from it appearing in many different forms, from paintings and calligraphy to ceramics, tea ceremony utensils and lacquerware.⁴ As in the past, the *Tales* continues to represent the epitome of high culture in Japan; it remains an excellent textbook for poets on how to write love poems; and it provides an indispensable introduction to Japanese aesthetics and literature of the Heian period.

Waka Poetry and Poem Tales

Waka – the most ancient and prestigious of the traditional poetry genres – constitute the literary heart of the *Tales*. The origins of *waka* stretch back to prehistoric times and its modern incarnation – *tanka* – still has many practitioners today. The term *waka* (literally, ‘Japanese poem’) can be used to denote all the various traditional verse-forms in Japanese (*tanka*, *renga*, *haiku*), but it usually refers to poems of five lines in a 5-7-5-7-7 syllabic sequence. (See the glossary, [here](#), for more on this.)

Since early times, it was common practice to collect *waka* poems in large anthologies (*kashū*). The first extant *waka* anthology is the *Man'yōshū*, completed in the mid eighth century. In the early tenth century, the first imperially sponsored anthology, the *Kokinshū*, was compiled. Official imperial sponsorship made *waka* a highly prestigious genre, a status that it retained for a thousand years until the modern period. The tradition of compiling selections of poems by famous poets (*shūkasen*) began in the early eleventh century with Fujiwara no Kinto (966–1041), whose *Sanjūrokuninsen* (Selected Verse of Thirty-six Poets; c.1009) can be considered the first work of this kind. By the time of Fujiwara no Teika (1162–1241), the tradition was well established, and Teika produced various such selections, as did his father, Shunzei (1114–1204). It was Teika who would compile the standard editions of both *The Tales of Ise* and *The Tale of Genji*.

When the poems were anthologized they were often accompanied by introductory headnotes (*kotobagaki*) giving the poem’s topic, date and circumstances of composition. Poems for which such details were unavailable were simply labelled ‘topic unknown’ (*dai shirazu*). An important feature of the *Tales* was that it developed these headnotes into short narratives built around poems or exchanges of poems – themselves based on the oral discussion of poems (*utagatari* – see [here](#)) – which displayed considerably more narrative complexity than the original headnote. Another distinctive feature of the *Tales* was that it often took a poem from an earlier compilation of poetry and changed

the setting, creating a completely new context for the poem. This in effect altered – or even in some cases completely transformed – the meaning of the poem.

When translated, some of the poems seem to be saying very little, but the originals often rely on a sophisticated use of rhetorical expression – especially wordplay and punning – to make them linguistically complex and aurally pleasing. In Japanese the skilful use of punning was admired as an expression of the poet's skill. Unlike English, Japanese has countless homonyms, making punning very easy but posing a particular challenge for the translator. Whereas in English punning can be dismissed as light and even childish, for Heian-period poets such wordplay was a means of demonstrating their artistic mastery, intended to delight their readers, and the language and rhythm of a great many of the poems in the *Tales* are indeed exquisite.

Waka make use of many sophisticated rhetorical and poetic devices, and some familiarity with these is crucial to the reader's understanding and enjoyment of the *Tales*. These include literary punning (*kakekotoba*), in which a word can be a simple pun, part of a phrase in which every word is a pun, or one whose meaning varies depending on whether it is read as the continuation of what precedes it or as the beginning of what follows; prefaces (*jokotoba*), where an initial segment of a poem serves as a 'preface' to a word introduced later in the poem; and associative words (*engo*), which are clusters of semantically related words embedded within a poem. Pillow words (*makura kotoba*), epithets used as conventional embellishments, are also important: for example, 'raging' (*chihayaburu*) is often paired with 'gods' (*kami*). *Waka* poetry also delights in poems with hidden words (*mono no na no uta*), as, for example, in [Episode 98](#) of the *Tales*, where 'pheasant' (*kiji*) is concealed within the poem and also relates to the tale's narrative, in a which a pheasant is presented with a poem as a gift. These important poetic devices, and others, are discussed at greater length in the glossary (see [here](#)), with many specific examples being cited in the commentary to individual episodes.

Composition of the Tales and Connection with the Kokinshū

The composition of the *Tales* was a long and convoluted process and has been the subject of intense debate for centuries. It is generally accepted that it was written by several authors over a period of up to a hundred years. Some of it was written as early as the end of the ninth century, and from then on the work grew gradually, until it reached its current form.

One theory regarding its composition is that the *Tales* was

autobiographical, originally penned by the hero, Narihira. As the oldest episodes were almost certainly written during his lifetime – Narihira died in 880 – there is a strong possibility that he was indeed the author. However, the only pieces that can be ascribed to him with reasonable certainty are the thirty poems that are also attributed to him in the *Kokinshū* anthology. Other poems attributed to Narihira in the *Tales* are not necessarily composed by him.⁵ Some scholars conjecture that Narihira composed the episodes with material he adapted from Chinese tales, and if this hypothesis is correct, then he can be credited as the inventor of the poem-tale genre that constitutes the narrative structure of the *Tales*.

Another theory related to the composition of the *Tales* is one advanced by Minoru Watanabe, the distinguished *Tales* scholar, which focuses on groups of poets active in the early Heian period who participated in salons and who may have taken a special interest in political outliers of the day. It is not clear why Narihira was chosen as its representative poet, but stories may have circulated among the salon members about a hero very much like Narihira, who shunned politics and societal norms to pursue ideals of love and beauty, and these stories eventually coalesced to form the core of the *Tales*.

Yet another theory about the authorship of the *Tales* has it that it was written by the renowned poet Lady Ise (born c.875), thus offering an explanation for its title. In medieval Japan, these two hypotheses were often combined, assigning original authorship to Narihira and further expansion to Lady Ise, a view that is no longer held. Yet another theory suggests that the poet and courtier Ki no Tsurayuki (872–945) was the author or partial author.

The *Tales* appears to have evolved in two distinct stages. In the first, a nucleus of around twenty episodes was composed, which appears to have served later as source material for the *Kokinshū* (completed c.905).⁶ That anthology includes several poems from the *Tales*, along with lengthy headnotes that closely resemble the prose parts of the episodes. In length and style, these headnotes are unlike others in the *Kokinshū*, suggesting that the *Tales* was in existence, in some form or other, before the *Kokinshū* was compiled and that parts of the *Tales* were incorporated in the *Kokinshū* with minimum editing. Conversely, it is clear that some episodes in the *Tales* ([Episode 25](#), for example) were composed around poems that appear in the *Kokinshū*, suggesting that these tales must have been written after the *Kokinshū*. All this indicates that the *Tales* was written not in one but in multiple stages and that its interaction with the *Kokinshū* was complex, in some cases serving as a source text for it, in others drawing on it for material.

The core episodes provide the nexus of the overall narrative of the *Tales*. Later episodes were then added by other poets, who copied the

style of the original episodes. Ki no Tsurayuki, the principal compiler of the *Kokinshū*, may have been the author of some of these. Because the poets Minamoto no Toru (822–95) and Shitago (911–83) feature in them, they have also been suggested as possible additional authors, but no one knows for certain.

The final version of the *Tales* may have been compiled by Minamoto no Shitago or by someone close to him. The reason why this is thought to be so is that in one episode (no. 39) ‘Shitago’ is mentioned without honorifics. Because nobles at the time did not use honorifics when referring to themselves or to an individual to whom they were related, this may signify that either Shitago was writing about himself or that someone closely connected to him was the author.

Episode 11 offers a few clues about the expansion of the *Tales* as it mentions the most recent of the historical figures to appear in the collection, Tachibana no Tadamoto. Tadamoto’s name appears in records from the mid tenth century, and it is likely that when a secret love affair of his became known someone wrote Episode 11 based upon it. This would date the episode’s creation to some time in the second half of the tenth century, and one can deduce from this that the expansion of the collection continued until at least then.

While the composition of the *Tales* has generally been regarded as occurring in two stages, pre- and post-*Kokinshū*, in the 1970s the renowned scholar Yoichi Katagiri posited a ‘three stage’ theory to explain the complex evolution of the work. According to Katagiri, between the original pre-*Kokinshū* *Tales* and the final version we know today was an intermediate stage, consisting of the original core episodes plus poems taken from Narihira’s poetry collection, the *Narihiraashū*, the extant versions of which contain roughly half the poems of the modern *Tales*. However, recent research shows that the *Narihiraashū* was most probably compiled after the *Tales*, and Katagiri’s theory is no longer seen as valid. The *Narihiraashū* was edited to give the impression of having been composed by Narihira, and the prefaces to the poems appear to have been deliberately changed from those in the *Tales*. Moreover, as research on the Narihira collection has progressed, it has become clear that the author of the collection did not merely place Narihira’s poems one after the other, but attempted to create a coherent fictional world. So Narihira’s poetry collection was most probably created after his death by someone else. It was common practice at the time to compile collections of poems by poets who had not left one themselves. Collections created in this way include the poems of Henjo (816–890) and Ono no Komachi (mid ninth century).⁷ These works were deliberately created to appear to be autobiographical, with prefaces added to poems that originally bore none.

As to the title of the *Tales*, perhaps the most credible theory is that it was named for [Episode 69](#), in which the hero attempts to have an affair with the priestess of the Ise Shrine. This story is likely to have seemed the most impressive to readers at the time because of its scandalous content. Kensho and Fujiwara no Kiyosuke, both twelfth-century poets, report the existence of versions of the *Tales* that started with [Episode 69](#), suggesting contemporary editors considered the episode to be highly important.⁸

Depicting the Hero

One of the central preoccupations of the *Tales* is the depiction of the hero, Ariwara no Narihira. There is only one historical record concerning his life – an entry in the *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* (True History of Three Reigns), the last of the six official histories compiled during the Heian period. According to this entry, he died on the twenty-eighth day of the fifth month of 880 at the age of fifty-six, so his birth is calculated to have been in 825. He was the fifth son of Prince Abo, son of Emperor Heizei (r. 806–9). His mother, Princess Ito, was the eighth daughter of Emperor Kanmu (r. 781–806), thus making Narihira a grandson of emperors on both sides of the family. The *Tales* attempts to depict Narihira as being from a fallen family, but it is important to remember that this is partially a fictional construct because he was in fact of the most noble lineage.

What dramatically altered the course of his family's and therefore own his fate, however, was an incident involving his father that took place in 810. The consort of the retired Emperor Heizei, Fujiwara no Kusuko, aided by her brother Nakanari, tried to restore Heizei to the throne. The attempt failed, and as a result Nakanari was executed, Kusuko committed suicide and Narihira's father, Abo, was sent into exile. Though later pardoned, Abo was reduced to commoner status, and Narihira and his brothers were thus removed from the imperial family. At the time, neither members of the imperial family nor commoners had surnames, only noble families. Following a petition by their father, the family was granted the surname 'Ariwara' shortly after Narihira was born, thereby giving them at least noble standing, although not restoring them to imperial status. These events cast a cloud over the life of Narihira and his clan, and Narihira was obliged to seek fame through literature, rather than politics, as might have been expected for someone of his lineage. They were also to exert a profound impact on the themes in the *Tales*, for the sense of belonging to the losing side of history informs every aspect of the work.

Because Narihira had lost his imperial status, he served in the bureaucracy as a commoner. He was an official (*kurōdo*) in the

Chamberlain's Office under both Emperor Ninmyō and Emperor Montoku, and developed a close friendship with Montoku's son, Prince Koretaka. He also served as the Chief Equerry of the Right (*migi no uma no kami* – see [Episodes 77, 78, 82, 83](#), etc.), supervising the care of the imperial horses, and as a captain of the Imperial Guard (*chūjō* – see [Episodes 97 and 99](#)). Later he rose in rank during the reign of Emperor Seiwa (r. 858–76), and eventually became head of the Chamberlain's Office under Emperor Yozei (r. 876–84). He was also made acting governor of Sagami (modern-day Kanagawa) and Mino (modern-day Gifu), although it is unclear whether he actually went to either province. His rank and achievements were relatively modest in comparison with his eldest brother, Yukihiro, who became a Middle Counsellor (*chūnagon*) in 882 and attained the very prestigious senior third rank, effectively making him a member of the senior nobility. (For more details on all the individuals named here, see Appendix 2, [here](#).)

Though the standard view of Narihira is that he lived on the periphery of high society, others argue that his promotion was quite normal for the time and for someone of his age, and his not reaching the rank equivalent to his brother's was simply because he did not live long enough; yet others posit the view that his possible affair with Takaiko, the future Empress of the Second Avenue (see [here](#)), could have prevented him from advancing in office for a period of time in his youth. Narihira and Takaiko certainly knew each other and she thought highly of him, and many early commentators describe a romance taking place before she entered the palace to become the consort of Emperor Seiwa and mother of the future emperor, Yozei, though it is unclear whether the affair actually took place.

The entry in *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* describes Narihira as being 'beautiful of body and appearance, having no respect for convention, without much learning, but skilled at composing Japanese poetry (*waka*)'.⁹ Contemporary scholars tend to interpret 'without much learning' to mean that Narihira had not studied deeply enough, if at all, the Confucian classics, which were essential reading for Heian-period male aristocrats, and though that may have been true, Narihira was clearly knowledgeable in other areas of Chinese culture such as literature and poetry. Since he was selected to attend envoys from the kingdom of Balhae (in northern Korea and Manchuria) in 872, he would certainly have needed to know literary Chinese. Moreover, a perusal of the *Tales* ([Episodes 1 and 69](#), for example) suggests that Narihira was widely read in the Chinese literature available at the time.

Many of the details of Narihira's life come from the *Kokinshū* and the *Tales*, and, given the nature of these sources, it is difficult to

separate fact from fiction. Despite the scarcity of information, we know that Narihira was both a fine-looking military man (he served as an imperial guard) and a great poet, which made him one of the earliest examples of what later became a much admired prototype in Japanese culture: a hero who combines military prowess and literary talent. He also came to be regarded as the archetypal poet-lover of the period, thanks to his combination of elegance, beauty, sophistication, kindness and poetic brilliance. Indeed, the ability to love well, in both romance and friendship, and to compose superior poems, are the key attributes of the persona of Narihira, attributes that feature repeatedly in the *Tales*, helping to unify the work as a whole.

In his role as ideal lover, Narihira has multiple partners, but we are not meant to think of him as a playboy. This may seem contradictory, but in each episode the hero appears to be entirely devoted to his beloved. And Narihira may not have actually had *all* the affairs he is depicted as having in the *Tales*; his adventures can also be read in part as a literary game of showing the hero in every kind of romantic entanglement in order to enhance his image as perfect lover, generous man and poet supreme. Thus the *Tales* can be read as examples of how the hero would respond in a representative situation, rather than seen as a strictly factual account.

Narihira is often also depicted in terms of his isolation, an important factor in his development as a poet. As Junzo Karaki points out, he is one of the first prototypes of the lonely outsider who would often appear in later Japanese literature.¹⁰ Narihira's intrinsic sympathy for those on the losing side, the difficulties of his involvements with women of higher rank, and his exquisite poems on the seasons are all informed by the poignancy of a man on the periphery of society.

Narihira's brilliance as a poet is acknowledged in several places in the *Tales*. He is often bestowed with the honorary role of composing poems of celebration by emperors and other dignitaries, and many of his poems display deep thought and poetic originality. This originality can be seen, for instance, in his unusual representation of the moon in the poem in [Episode 88](#), which opens with the surprising admission that the poet tends not to admire the moon, before developing into a witty but profound lament on encroaching old age.

In the preface to the *Kokinshū* the editor, Tsurayuki (who incidentally was a distant relative of Narihira), offers a famous critique of Narihira's poetic skills, noting that he was a poet of too much emotion (*kokoro*) and too few words (*kotoba*). Narihira's style is compared to a flower whose petals have already withered but whose fragrance lingers. There is a tendency among commentators of all periods to see this as criticism, but Tsurayuki is, in fact, praising

Narihira's poems and claiming that they have a subtle lasting beauty. The fact that Narihira was selected as one of only six poets to be reviewed in the preface is itself a clear indication of how much he was admired, and Tsurayuki also included two poems by Narihira in his *Tosa nikki* (Tosa Diary; 935).

Narihira's fame grew over time. In the early eleventh century, the poet-critic Fujiwara no Kinto included Narihira in his *Sanjūrokuninsen* (Selected Verse of Thirty-six Poets) a further testament to the high regard in which he was held. About two hundred years later, the great poet and editor Fujiwara no Teika – whose edition of the *Tales* became the standard one – places him among a handful of outstanding contributors to the 'way of poetry' (*uta no michi* or *kadō*) in his *Kindaishūka* (Superior Poems of Our Time).

Despite all this, it must be kept in mind that the portrayal of Narihira as a poet in the *Tales* is partly fictional and that not all the poems ascribed to him are actually by him. The original readers of the poems would have been aware of this. The idea that the *Tales* consistently presumes that Narihira was 'the man' who composed each poem was a deliberate fiction perpetrated by a succession of compilers and editors in a tongue-in-cheek manner for the amusement and entertainment of their audience. However, later readers may not have known who wrote the poems and assumed that they were all by the real Narihira. So there was a gradual change in perception: first, that the hero was the fictional Narihira; then, wrongly, that the hero was the real Narihira.

Love in the Tales

The comprehensive treatment of love is a main theme in the *Tales*, and one of the elements that makes it a work of greatness.¹¹ All kinds of love are portrayed: reciprocated and unrequited; between males; between generations and individuals of different rank; between the sophisticated hero of the capital and the simple countrywoman. Other depictions of love include a woman leaving a man ([Episodes 60 and 62](#)); incestuous love ([Episode 49](#)); an old woman's love ([Episode 63](#)); hinted-at infidelity ([Episode 13](#)); an amusingly tolerant view of infidelity ([Episode 43](#)); and young and passionate love ([Episode 36](#)). The love between a lord and his vassal is depicted in [Episodes 82 and 83](#), while the love of friends is the theme of [Episode 16](#), and filial love is described in [Episode 84](#), which focuses on the hero's devotion to his mother, Princess Ito.

One of the key manifestations of love is the forbidden variety, a theme later developed in *The Tale of Genji* as one of the chief engines of the narrative. Forbidden love is the basis of [Episodes 4 and 5](#), in

which the lady beyond the hero's reach is the Empress of the Second Avenue, and also [Episode 69](#), in which the hero is depicted as having the briefest of affairs with the emperor's daughter. Other examples include [Episodes 73](#) and [93](#).

A man would take an interest in a woman based on hearsay about her virtues or after having somehow caught a glimpse of her (*kaimami* – see [here](#)). In the Heian period, women of high rank were confined indoors, so men often saw them for the first time only just before they made love, which could lead to disappointment on both sides. As they could not speak to or see each other, convention demanded that, in order to establish a relationship, they had to exchange poems, and proficiency in poetry composition was expected. Until they actually met, the way men and women evaluated prospective partners was based on the quality of the poems, the tastefulness of the paper on which they were written, and the beauty of the calligraphy.

The man would normally begin sending love letters and poems to the woman and this marked the beginning of love. These exchanges had to adhere to a particular code of conduct. For example, in the woman's initial replies, it was the convention to feign disinterest before eventually agreeing to a meeting. And if one received a poem on spring, the poem composed in reply was expected to be on the same season; if it were on another season, it would be a sign of a lack of taste. Replies were also expected to cleverly pick up an element of the original poem and quote from it or refer to it in the reply. There would, of course, have been differing levels of skill in composing and appreciating poems, but a basic knowledge of the art of composing poetry was *de rigueur* for all courtiers; indeed, without such skills they could have expected little success in the art of love.

Courting began with the man secretly visiting the woman after dark and leaving before daybreak for fear of discovery and consequent damage to their reputations. On the morning after the third night, the *tokoro arawashi* ceremony would take place, in which the man would remain at the woman's home until after daybreak and consume a meal with her parents, thus revealing himself to them. In many cases, the parents would have already selected this man to be their daughter's husband and would therefore know who the suitor was, but the ritual was followed none the less. For these three days, it was important for the man to send the woman a 'morning-after poem' (*kinuginu no uta* – see [here](#)) after returning home the next morning, if the relationship had been consummated. If the visits did not continue for three nights, the relationship was considered to have ended.

Japan is said to have originally been a matriarchal society, with the family home and fortune passed down from mother to daughter. In the Nara period (710–94), Confucian patriarchy was imported from

China, and men became the centre of the household, but elements of the earlier matriarchal system retained a strong presence into the Heian period, especially in marriage customs. As several of the tales imply, the ideal for a man was a marriage that would support him financially and further his standing at court, while the bride's family looked for a well-connected groom whose career seemed assured. In keeping with the matriarchal tradition, even at the beginning of the marriage, the man's clothing and other daily necessities and costs were paid for by the woman's household (as illustrated in [Episode 23](#)).

In the capital, the most common marital arrangements were based on visits by the man to the woman (known as *kayoikon*, 'commuting marriage', or *tsumadoikon*, 'wife-visiting marriage'). While it was customary among the nobility for a husband to live near the wife's parents, the couple often did not reside together, and because the husband was not in the family home continuously, it was possible for other men to visit. This meant also that a husband could take more than one wife, as illustrated in [Episode 23](#). This is the social context underpinning many of the romantic episodes in the *Tales*.

Since married couples did not live together, and attitudes towards love and sex were freer among both men and women, having multiple partners was not frowned upon as much as it is today. This is reflected in the *Tales* in the concept of *irogonomi* (literally, 'a love of colour'), which may be translated as 'a penchant for having love affairs' or a person with such a penchant. For men, exchanging poems and finding opportunities to approach women were all part of *irogonomi*, a critical weapon in the lover's armoury. However, the expression was also applied to those who engaged in this behaviour to an extreme, implying both criticism and amusement. Putting it in modern terms, someone who does not know how to play might be considered dull, but someone who does nothing but play might be looked down on as a playboy. The expression is not as negative as 'lascivious' and 'wanton' are in English, but it does have different connotations depending on gender. It may be translated as 'fickle' in reference to women, as in 'changing one's affections frequently', and 'gallant' in reference to men in the sense of 'a man who pays special attention to women' or who is 'knowledgeable in the affairs of the heart', depending on the context. For men, the term thus means those who are somewhat frivolous and interested in having numerous relationships, and, for women, those who quickly tire of lovers.

The *Tales* is told entirely from a male point of view and tends to be more critical of women, including many references to the word *irogonomi* in relation to them. The women, who are 'fond of colour' are coquettish, eager and charming lovers, but also unfaithful. They are adept in affairs of the heart, take pleasure in the pursuit of romantic

liaisons, and twist the earnest hero around their little fingers.¹² But it is precisely these qualities that attract the attention of the hero, so his ‘suffering’ clearly includes an element of pleasure. The hero’s encounters with these fickle women fulfils an important function in the *Tales*, showing us Narihira’s sincerity in responding to cruelty and coldness, and enhancing the image of the hero as the ideal lover of his time.

Despite his many affairs, the hero himself is rarely described in the *Tales* as an *irogonomi*. [Episode 58](#) is one of the few examples in which Narihira is referred to by the term, although here it is used in conjunction with an expression referring to him as a man of refined taste and gives an essentially positive impression. The term may be translated here as ‘knowledgeable in the affairs of the heart’. In [Episode 61](#), a woman from Tsukushi uses the term in reference to a rumour about the hero, though he makes no approaches to her in the end. By contrast, Itaru, who is introduced as the most famous gallant in all the land, does make advances, flirting with the woman in question even though she is in mourning. The heroes of the *Tales* and *The Tale of Genji* both show a strong penchant for affairs of the heart, but, unlike Casanovas such as Itaru, they are always completely sincere in their feelings.

The Theme of Friendship

While romantic love is the most celebrated theme of the *Tales*, the work was also the first in Japanese literature to highlight male friendship, a theme that would also be of importance in *The Tale of Genji*. One major literary precedent on intimate exchanges between close male friends is the great Chinese poet Bai Juyi (772–846), who often wrote about his close friend Yuan Zhen, also a poet, in his *Baishi wenji* (Collected Works of Bai Juyi). Their relationship was one of the great friendships in Chinese literary history. Friendship is also a virtue in Confucianism, one of the major intellectual doctrines of Heian-period Japan. Once two individuals become friends, they are meant to be true to each other to the end, even in the direst of circumstances.

Informed by this tradition, friendship has many manifestations in the *Tales*. The motif is established early on, when the hero travels eastwards on a difficult journey, accompanied by his friends. Later, Tsuneyuki (see Appendix 2, [here](#)) and Narihira show their heartfelt love and devotion to the cloistered prince (Saneyasu, a son of Emperor Ninmyo) after his renunciation of the secular world. And [Episode 83](#) recounts the hero’s visit to Prince Koretaka’s snow-covered abode, after he has become a recluse. That Narihira remains true to him even after he loses his imperial status is of the utmost importance here and

his braving the deep snow of midwinter to visit his friend proves his fealty. Indeed, the main interest in friendship in the *Tales* is devotion to another person despite declining fortunes, a theme that underlies not only the behaviour of the characters, but also the aesthetic vision of the entire work. [Episode 81](#) – a paean of love and respect for Minamoto no Toru, an early ninth-century nobleman – is another fine example of this. Whereas love between men and women is often fickle and fleeting, loyalty, devotion and friendship between men are lasting bonds in the Heian universe.

Expressions of friendship have much in common with expressions of love. [Episode 38](#) features an exchange between the hero – who is visiting the house of the absent Ki no Arisune (see [here](#)) – and Arisune himself, who returns later. The first poem states that Narihira had not known until this point what the world calls ‘love’, but now he understands it thanks to his friend’s late return, and he teasingly chides Arisune for being late. The usual object of ‘love’ in poetry is someone of the opposite sex, but the verb *kou* (to long for), from which the noun *koi* (love) derives, has a broad range of meanings and can refer to love for a friend. Male Heian courtiers found nothing unnatural or unusual about using ‘love’ playfully with regard to a male friend. Female friendship, by contrast, does not exist in the *Tales*.

In many lovely scenes, the pleasure of friendship is celebrated on excursions to the countryside. [Episodes 66, 67 and 68](#), while ostensibly composing poems on the genius of place, also depict the joys of such outings with friends and loyal retainers. [Episode 82](#) presents a wonderful depiction of the pleasures of fealty and friendship informed by deep affection. Watching the cherry blossom together, all the members of the gathering compose poems, regardless of rank and social differences. The hero composes one of the most memorable poems in the *Tales*, a meditation on the poet’s deep love of cherry blossom, and the whole party decorate their hair with blossom and twigs, drink sake and compose more poems until late into the night. Poems on friendship also appear in the *Kokinshū*,¹³ but the theme of friendship would eventually fade in later Japanese literature, to be replaced by the theme of absolute loyalty in the samurai tradition.

Style and Language

One of the key aspects of the *Tales* is the celebration of language. The work is replete with every kind of stylistic innovation and wordplay and specific examples are examined in detail in the commentary. Another important element is the belief in ancient Japan that words contained spirits and were therefore sacred, hence uttering celebratory

words could lead to fortuitous events coming to pass. Known as *kotodama shinko*, this distinctive feature of the *Tales* also underpins the concept of *kotohogu* (see [here](#)), uttering words of felicitation either before or after an auspicious event. Such blessings were traditionally delivered by a ‘venerable old man’ (*okina*), an important figure in Heian culture.¹⁴ In the *Tales*, the hero, Narihira, is frequently depicted celebrating auspicious events and invoking blessings and good fortune through poetry, thus fulfilling the role of the *okina* in those episodes where he is depicted as an old man. (For more on the role of the *okina* in the *Tales*, see [here](#).)

The *Tales* is also highly experimental, not least in its innovative poem-tale structure. Many of the episodes recast existing narratives or place poems, setting them in a new context. For example, [Episode 76](#) takes a poem of celebration from the *Kokinshū* (no. 871) and transforms it into one hinting at a former love affair between the hero and the Empress of the Second Avenue.¹⁵ Changing the context of a poem could ascribe new meanings to it, and this is a central preoccupation of the *Tales*. Indeed, there is no doubt that much of what delighted its original readers was the playful way in which changing the narrative settings gave new life to famous characters and poems. In [Episode 6](#), for instance, the addition of a comment on a ‘real’ event by the narrator at the end of the story – an adaptation from the Chinese *Shijing* (Classic of Poetry), in which poems are followed by interpretive commentary from a Confucian standpoint – provides a striking contrast to the more fantastical tale that precedes it as well as being very innovative in the way that it brings together two different genres.

The narrative technique of the *Tales* is itself highly innovative, characterized by the repeated use of the verbal form *omoiken*, which roughly means ‘what could he have been thinking of ...’, to examine the motives of the characters, especially the hero. Such questioning by the narrator is meant to encourage the reader to decide for himself what psychological state the hero is in, especially when this is rarely described directly. In many cases, of course, the reader knows perfectly well the reasons behind the character’s actions (usually desperate or intense love), so the conjecture is mostly intended as a humorous rhetorical aside, contributing to the playful narrative style.

Indeed, the *Tales* is full of exuberant and sometimes offbeat humour. [Episode 120](#), for example, contains a hilarious poem based on the Tsukuma Festival, at which women in attendance were required to balance as many pots on their head as they had had lovers. On other occasions amusement derives from men playfully assuming female roles in poetry exchanges, such as in [Episode 121](#) – another tale featuring eccentric headgear – and [Episodes 58](#) and [105](#).

Humour and playful language can also be tools in the game of love: in [Episode 3](#), for example, the poet sends a gift of a particular seaweed known as *hijiki* to his beloved because its name is a homonym of *hijikimono* (bedding), to express his wish to share a bed with her. Play, especially verbal play, is central to the *Tales* and no doubt one of the features that have made it so enduringly popular.

The *Tales* also subverts convention and literary expectations to striking effect. The most openly subversive moment occurs in [Episode 69](#), in which the hero is depicted as having the briefest of affairs with the emperor's daughter. The relationship would have been doubly taboo because the princess, in addition to being the daughter of the emperor, was serving as priestess of the sacred Ise shrine and thus forbidden to have relations with men. Several other episodes depict violations of taboo or convention, usually because of love. In [Episode 63](#), a woman nearly one hundred years old visits the house of the hero to catch a glimpse of him. Catching a glimpse of a lady was a trope often exploited in tales to announce the onset of romance. As women were usually expected to remain indoors, however, it was generally men who did the glimpsing. The great age of the woman marks a further deviation from the norm. By turning literary convention on its head, this episode offers a radical and comic subversion of romantic conventions.

Important Sub-themes of the Tales

In addition to the main themes of love and friendship, outlined above, several sub-themes can be identified in the *Tales*, including journeys and excursions and the divide between the country and the capital – discussed in the commentary to specific episodes. Related to these is the trope of exile, and the *Tales* is an important work in the development of this theme within Japanese literature. The journey to the east in [Episodes 7–15](#) is based on the motif of the exile of a young nobleman (*kishu ryūritan*), in which the hero, of high birth and status, is banished or goes into voluntary exile from the court and encounters various challenges before he returns home. Such tales are ubiquitous in Japanese mythology and classical literature: Prince Yamato Takeru can be cited as an earlier example in the eighth-century *Kojiki*, a collection of myths concerning the origin of Japan and one of the oldest chronicles in the country; the warrior chief Minamoto no Yoshitsune is a famous later example; while *The Tale of Genji* includes an episode describing Genji's self-imposed exile to the lonely coast of Suma.

Exile also acts as an important narrative device in the *Tales* because it takes the hero into situations of crisis in which he can write

exquisite poems in response, as well as reinforcing the sense of his being on the periphery. Being on the losing side of history naturally heightens one's sensitivity as a poet and attracts sympathy from the readers, and the Japanese have always had a special place in their hearts for tragic heroes and outsiders, rather than the victorious.

Also central to the *Tales* is the idea of elegance (*miyabi*), a term that encompasses a broad spectrum of meanings, from skill in calligraphy and poetry and refinement of taste in dress and décor, to, more importantly, kind and courteous behaviour. Having a romantic heart and a deep and poetic commitment to the way of love is bound up with elegant behaviour, and in this the protagonist proves himself a paragon. The hero's display of elegant behaviour through kindness is depicted in [Episode 107](#), in which his actions as head of the house are described as both kind and considerate – the embodiment of *miyabi*. In the episode in which the hero makes love to an elderly woman (no. 63), the deed is made possible because of his great kindness, even to those whom he does not necessarily hold dear. Another aspect of the depiction of *miyabi* is the fond recollection of the time when a noble family flourished in the past, highly praising the elegant tradition that they represent and longing for their return; [Episode 77](#) offers a good illustration of this. The antithesis of *miyabi* is *hinabi*, or that which is countrified – the courtly versus the rustic. Several scenes in the *Tales* contrast the sophisticated ways of the capital with the lack of refinement displayed by rural dwellers. There has been a tendency in modern times to see *miyabi* as epitomizing the aesthetics of the *Tales* and Heian noble culture; however, the word appears only once in the text (in [Episode 1](#)), and though it is certainly important, it is more appropriate to see it as only one of the many concepts that enrich the *Tales*.

The aesthetic concept of *setsugekka* (snow, moon and flowers) is another important sub-theme in the *Tales*. It derives from a poem by Bai Juyi addressed to his dear friend Yuan Zhen whom he describes as remembering most fondly when he sees the snow, moon or flowers. Snow refers to winter, the moon to autumn, and flowers to spring – three words that indicate aesthetic appreciation of the seasons. Another way to think of them is as representations of three forms of white: that of snow, the moon and of flowers (which almost always meant plum or cherry blossom).¹⁶ The colour white was especially valued in the Japanese aesthetic because of its purity; combined in poetry with the various sensory delights of each season, it is the perfect colour for expressing the loneliness and isolation felt by the hero. The passing of spring (see [here](#)) is also celebrated in several episodes, as the epitome of poignant regret.

Conclusion

The *Tales* presents a world that is fresh, charming, unadorned and magical – quite different from the more sophisticated world of the later *Tale of Genji*. It brings to life Heian court romance and gives a unique insight into it. This is a world where both the deepest and the most humorous aspects of love are expressed through poetry and where pursuing the way of love means being wholly committed to poetic expression. Such a commitment bestows upon the *Tales* both dignity and elegance, while the wry outsider's perspective imbues this elegance with poignancy and depth.

Narihira's marginalization – so important in the work – paves the way for his abandonment of existing social mores and transformation into a man of exquisite aesthetic sensibility, capable of deep sympathy and kindness, and this transformation in turn contributes to his becoming a master of poetic expression. The prototype of this kind of hero formed the basis of Heian-period literature and the aesthetic of *mono no aware* (the pathos of things) that would become so central to *The Tale of Genji*. The figure of the outsider, meanwhile, would become a central trope of Japanese literature and culture, and it is no exaggeration to claim that its first appearance in the *Tales* was an epoch-making event in Japanese literary history.

The *Tales* has long been thought of as an incomplete work, full of enigma and riddles. Since its inception, it has provoked endless discussion, which continues to this day. It poses several challenges to readers, not least because it represents the work of several hands and was composed over a long period. Stylistically, the *Tales* presents a unique mode of storytelling. On first reading, it appears disjointed and fragmentary, and its subtleties are often difficult to understand. Repeated readings, however, make clear that the work has its own inner logic and consistency in theme, style and subject matter.

Though not necessarily composed as a textbook on affairs of the heart, the acute observations in the manifold love scenes in the *Tales* naturally led in the following centuries to its being considered an important guide to the ways of love, and indeed its lessons are just as relevant today as when it was first composed. The *Tales* presents us with a new way of looking at life and love – an alternative and richer way of living that embraces and transforms our sadness and frailty as human beings. This alone would be enough to guarantee its place as a classic of world literature. But the *Tales* is also extraordinary for its rich use of irony and humour. It shows us a bygone world of the Japanese aristocracy while revealing itself as a work at the forefront of literary and linguistic innovation.

In conclusion, there are many ways to enjoy and appreciate the *Tales*. It is a work of the first importance in world literature, one that

is both radical and subversive in style and content and yet, simultaneously, a work of great balance and beauty. It is a seminal work of Japanese literature and culture, as well as being an enduring guidebook on poetic expression related to love. And, above all, it is a timeless encapsulation of the exquisite poetry and aesthetics of the nobility of the early Heian period.

NOTES

1. Surnames are generally given first in classical Japanese; thus ‘Ariwara’ is the family name and ‘Narihira’ the given name.
2. The complicated relationship of the *Man’yōshū* and the *Kokinshū* to the *Tales* is discussed throughout the commentary (pp. 173–300). The influence of Chinese literature and culture is also discussed in the commentary (Episodes 1, 5, 6, 73, 80, 83, 91 and 102, among others), as is the influence of Buddhism (Episodes 39 and 50).
3. Eileen Kato, ‘Load Allmarshy! Yes we have nō transformations! So lend your earwicker to a zing-zang meanderthal tale!’, in *Currents in Japanese Culture: Translations and Transformations*, ed. Amy Vladeck Heinrich (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), pp. 1–17.
4. See the commentary on Episode 9.
5. Examples include the poem in Episode 114, which was actually by Yukihiro. Here we have to distinguish between the historical and fictional Narihira – the real individual who did not compose these poems and the fictional one who did.
6. The crossover core episodes are numbers 2, 4, 5, 9, 17, 19, 41, 47, 48, 51, 69, 76, 80, 82, 83, 84, 87, 88, 103, 107, 123, 125 (underlined episodes show a particularly strong lexical and structural resemblance to the corresponding sections of the *Kokinshū*).
7. One of the most outstanding poets of the Heian period, Ono no Komachi is the only woman among Tsurayuki’s Six Poetic Geniuses (*rokkasen*) – six poets to be reviewed in the preface to the *Kokinshū*. Probably a lady-in-waiting during the reigns of Ninmyō and Montoku (see Appendix 2, [here](#)), she is said to have been a great beauty who treated her lovers cruelly, but this is almost certainly a later legend. Only her twenty-one poems in the *Kokinshū* and *Gosenshū* are considered authentic, but a great many more have been attributed to her in later sources.
8. Unfortunately, none of these versions seem to have survived. Their place in the overall evolution and expansion of the *Tales* is unknown, but current scholarship sees them as having been variant texts, rather than being closely connected to the original

version of the *Tales*.

9. *Kokushi taikei*, vol. 4: *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Koubunkan, 1966), entry for the twenty-eighth of the fifth month of 880.
10. Junzo Karaki, *Muyōsha no keifu* (A Genealogy of the Protagonist of No Use) (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1959).
11. The words that are used most frequently to refer to love in Heian-period court literature are *koi* (longing) and *omo(h)i* (longing, love), both of which describe longing or desire for an absent or distant loved one, but love-induced melancholia is only one of the many facets of love that are explored and celebrated in the *Tales*.
12. [Episodes 25](#), [28](#), [37](#) and [42](#) all depict such volatile, cold-hearted ladies.
13. See nos. 399, 969 and 978–9.
14. There is also a connection with the *okina* character that appears in later Noh plays and folk performing arts as a manifestation of a deity, offering words of congratulation.
15. There are various examples of this recasting of poems in different contexts. A poem almost identical to the one in [Episode 21](#) that begins with the lines ‘I will disappear / from your life’ is repeated in virtually the same terms in Variant Episodes 5 and 10 (not included here), but within different settings. In [Episode 21](#), it is employed at the end of a sequence of love poems by a woman who, as we learn subsequently, was having secret affairs even while making such protests. In Variant [Episode 5](#), it is employed by the woman to bemoan the tortures of a secret love. In Variant [Episode 10](#), the poem is employed as a variant version of the poem in [Episode 9](#), where the hero sends the poems back to his beloved in the capital. See also [Episode 19](#).
16. There are numerous poems about the moon ([Episodes 4](#), [11](#), [69](#), [73](#) and [82](#)), snow ([9](#), [17](#), [67](#), [83](#) and [85](#)) and spring ([80](#), [82](#), [90](#) and [97](#)).

Note on the Translation and Text

The *Tales* is an extremely difficult work to translate. Contemporary translations and critical editions produced by the leading Japanese publishing houses, such as Shōgakukan and Iwanami, contain a surprising variety of conflicting interpretations of both the prose and the poetry. The poems in particular have multiple and sometimes completely antithetical readings and a long history of diverse interpretation. Textual and semantic ambiguities and variants among received manuscripts often make it impossible to establish with any certainty a correct reading, and among contemporary Japanese scholars there remains a great diversity of opinion. Thus for a significant portion of the original, definitive interpretations are difficult.

Some examples illustrate typical complications of the prose. [Episode 35](#) contains the word *awao*, which is thought to mean a knot that easily comes undone. However, based on the words that follow it in the Japanese, it may also be understood in the opposite way, as a knot that is difficult to loosen. In [Episode 34](#), the expression *omonashi* can be read either as ‘brazen’ or as ‘swallowing his pride’. If the first reading is accepted, the translation would read: ‘He seems to have bared his heart without any sense of shame.’ If the second, then it would be: ‘He seems to have swallowed his pride and bared his heart.’ No consensus has been reached on the meaning of these and other words and phrases, so the translator must ultimately make a choice. The poems are often no less ambiguous. My commentary on the fifth poem in [Episode 21](#), for instance, gives a detailed analysis of widely divergent interpretations by several leading Japanese scholars.

The main goal of the translation was to make the *Tales* as accessible as possible to the contemporary English-language reader. When confronted with multiple interpretations of the same poem and prose section, I have usually chosen the one most widely accepted by contemporary scholars, though sometimes I have selected an interpretation that may have less support among modern scholars but which makes for a more compelling narrative. I have noted the alternative readings in the commentary, however, and indicated when the translation differs from the most widely accepted interpretations.

Allowing for such ambiguities of interpretation, I have made every effort to keep the translation as faithful to the original as possible, to help the reader savour as far as possible the true flavour of the magical world of the *Tales*. The translation was checked by several experts along the way, and one of the foremost of these, Tokuro Yamamoto, was always available for consultation on difficult passages. When the text appears vague, as the original sometimes is, the reader can refer to the commentary for supplementary information.

As noted elsewhere, the *Tales* has spawned a rich interpretative tradition. In translating the work, I have worked on the principle that traditional interpretations of the *Tales* should take a secondary role to those of contemporary scholars. The reason for this is that, while traditional interpretations are of historical interest, they are often fanciful and not based on sound philological or scholarly research.

The most challenging aspect of translating the *Tales* is certainly the poetry itself. With some exceptions, the poems are less semantically compressed or rhetorically complex than those of Japanese poetry composed in later times, such as the ‘modern’ poetry anthologized in the *Shinkokinshū* (New Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems; c.1205). Their very lack of rhetorical sophistication contributes to the unrivalled charm and beauty of many of them, although some are perfunctory or occasional compositions of little distinction. Despite their relative simplicity, however, the poems are often oblique and depend on context for their meaning. To give an example, the first poem in [Episode 20](#) seems to say only: ‘Though it is spring, this bough of maple leaves I’ve picked for you glows with the red of autumn.’ What it actually conveys are the poet’s feelings for his beloved which are as passionate as the leaves he sends her are red:

I send you this to show
that though it may still be spring,
the leaves have taken on
an autumn red
deep as my love for you.

(*Kimi ga tame / taoreru eda wa / haru nagara / kaku koso aki no / momiji
shinikere*)

In the translation, the final line was added to make the meaning clearer and to convey what readers of the time would immediately have understood.

Much tends to be made of the ambiguity of classical Japanese, but such ambiguity is unlikely to have been experienced by a Japanese reader of the time. Most of what the modern reader finds ambiguous is due to a lack of knowledge of the social mores and historical background of the period, or to ignorance of some aspect of grammar

or vocabulary. The contemporary reader would presumably have understood most of the nuances, including the most complex rhetorical structures. For example, when the author of what is arguably the most complex poem in the *Tales*, the acrostic poem in [Episode 9](#), uses the words ‘hem’, ‘fulling’ and ‘wear’ as associative words (*engo* – see [here](#)) for ‘robes’, a reader of the time would have been expected to understand these and applaud the wit and sophistication of the poet. Few of the words in the Japanese would have been obscure for the original readers and I have endeavoured, in this translation, to make them as comprehensible to the modern reader as they would have been to readers of the time.

Japanese poetry avoids rhyme and depends more on rhythm (*onritsu*) than on metre, which is quantitative, not accentual. English free verse is thus a very natural choice when translating Japanese classical poetry. Some believe that classical poetry as well as contemporary *tanka*, which uses the same form as classical *waka* (see [here](#)), should be translated following the syllable count of *waka* and *tanka*, in a five-line sequence of 5-7-5-7-7. According to this view, all translations of poems should have the same number of syllables (thirty-one), but this makes for an unnatural and meaningless constriction in English, and I have not done this. However, in order to give a sense of the *form* of the original, I have used five lines for the poems, with a few exceptions, one being the acrostic poem based on I-R-I-S in [Episode 9](#). Because the word ‘iris’ has only four letters, the acrostic poem could only be four lines.

Where possible I have incorporated the wordplay and punning of the original, which are all outlined in the commentary. For example, the poem in [Episode 98](#) has the letters for ‘pheasant’ hidden in the poem, as in the original. These are in boldface in the translation, so that the reader can see the kind of wordplay that was so important in the *Tales*. The poem in [Episode 116](#) has a lovely rhythm in the original, and I have tried to recreate this with repetition in the English version.

Should imagery in Japanese traditional poetry be translated as similes or metaphors? Translations into modern Japanese in the contemporary commentaries tend to interpret the images as similes using the words *yō* or *no gotoku* (‘like’ or ‘as’). In the original, however, this information was often only implied, because the number of syllables was predetermined and it was not always possible to include all grammatical information. Although the words for ‘like’ and ‘as’ are not explicit in the poem, it does not mean that they are not part of the meaning. Nor does it mean that the image should instead be interpreted as a metaphor. It is often preferable to translate such images as similes rather than metaphors, because similes are not as

forceful as metaphors and are in keeping with the love of indirection that informs Japanese poetry. In some cases, however, a metaphor is preferable. The criterion I used in choosing between them was which would read best as a poem in English.

One of the most difficult phrases to translate in the *Tales* is *mukashi otoko arikeri* (literally, 'long ago, there was a man'). Donald Keene once joked to me that he gave up translating the *Tales* when he realized how difficult it would be to translate this apparently simple phrase, which opens many of the episodes. The words in Japanese conjure up an entire world of both poetry and romance, and for many in Japan it is synonymous with both the *Tales* and Narihira, the hero. If we read each individual episode in English as depicting 'a' man, it means that each episode is about a different man. However, for centuries, Japanese readers have read most of the episodes as being about Narihira (see [here](#)), unless another character is mentioned. Because of the ambiguity, the phrase has been translated variously as 'Back then, this man', which seems much too colloquial, and as 'Once there was a man', which gives the impression that each episode may concern an entirely different man. I have usually translated the phrase as 'Long ago, *the* man' so that most readers will identify him as the same person throughout. Occasionally, 'a man' appears, but the reader should generally read all the episodes as being about Narihira unless someone else, such as his brother, Yukihiro (see [here](#)), is specifically mentioned. We can see the difference between the two in the following translations of the opening of [Episode 102](#):

Long ago, there lived a man who was not much of a poet but understood well the subtleties of the human heart.

Long ago, the man, though not much of a poet, understood well the subtleties of the human heart.

In the first, we might assume that this episode is about someone other than Narihira, because every reader knows that he was an excellent poet. In the second, we know that it is our hero because he is identified as 'the man', and we can also recognize the profound irony of the narrator's comment when he states that Narihira was not much of a poet – every reader would immediately recognize that the reverse was true.

None the less, when the expression 'long ago' is used, the vagueness of 'a man' in the first sentence seems more natural, and combining the vague 'long ago' with the definite 'the man' is jarring. In such cases, I have made an exception to my general policy and used 'a man', as in the opening of [Episodes 84](#) and [102](#). But readers should still take these as referring to the same man, Narihira, unless otherwise noted.

For the word *irogonomi* (see [here](#)) I have given differing translations depending on the gender of the protagonist. For women I have

translated it as ‘fickle’, as in those who quickly tire of their lovers. For men I have used the somewhat rare word ‘gallant’ in both the positive and negative sense of the meaning. The positive sense is of one who pays court to ladies, a ladies’ man. The negative meaning has the sense of a playboy or paramour. The *Tales* has examples of both uses: Narihira is a ladies’ man; Itaru ([Episode 39](#)) is a playboy.

Following the example of modern Japanese editions, I have added titles to the episodes although there are none in the original. In addition, some passages in the *Tales* employ polite language (*keigo*), and I have used a more formal English in those cases, as can be seen in [Episode 76](#) (indicated here in *italics*):

Long ago, the Empress of the Second Avenue, then still known as the consort mother of the crown prince, *departed on a pilgrimage to the august shrine* of her ancestral deities. As she was *bestowing gifts upon* those present, an elderly man in service in the Imperial Guard *humbly received his gift directly from her carriage*.

Finally, when translating the Japanese word for ‘woman’ (*onna*), I have used ‘lady’ when she is of high social status and ‘woman’ otherwise.

This translation is based on the Shōgakukan edition (see Further Reading, [here](#)) that includes the *Tales of Ise* edited by Teisuke Fukui, which is based on the Tenpukūbon manuscript, edited and transcribed by Fujiwara no Teika in 1234 and currently held by Gakushūin University in Tokyo. Most modern editions are based on this text. The numbering of poems follows the *Shinpen kokka taikan*, 10 vols (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1983–92). For notes on romanization of the Japanese text, see Appendix 4, [here](#). Macrons are used to extend vowel sounds in the romanized form of Japanese. I have tried to keep them to a minimum, omitting them from the names of people and places; exceptions are transliterated words and phrases in the editorial matter and in cases where it is part of the official English name of a company, such as the publishing firm Shōgakukan.



On the Plain of Kasuga

1

Coming of Age

Long ago, a young man who had just come of age went hawking on his family estate by the village of Kasuga near the former capital of Nara. Two beautiful sisters were living there, and the young man happened to catch a glimpse of them through a gap in the fence. Discovering such beautiful ladies in this incongruous setting at the old abandoned capital filled him with excitement. And he cut off a piece from the hem of his hunting robe, dashed off a poem on it, and had it sent in to them. Shinobu ferns had been rubbed into the fabric of his robe, creating an irregular pattern.

Lavender shoots
on the Plain of Kasuga,
like the riotous patterns
of this purple robe—
what tangled feelings you arouse.

The whole affair must have delighted him, as he composed the poem on the spot; it was surely inspired by this one:

My heart is as tangled
as the wild fern patterns
of Michinoku's Shinobu cloth.
Since it is not my fault
whom should I blame for this?

The elegant behaviour of men in those days could be quite impulsive.

2

Endless Rains

Long ago, after the capital had moved from Nara but before the buildings had been completed, a lady was living in the western part of the city. She was greatly superior to the ladies around her, and her disposition was even more lovely than her appearance. It seemed that she was not alone, but, even so, the earnest man spent a night with her, during which they conversed intimately. On a day in late spring in the midst of a light rain, he sent her a poem. What could his feelings have been?

Neither getting up nor sleeping,
we passed the night till dawn,
but since then I have spent my time
in the endless rains of spring
lost in thought, alone.

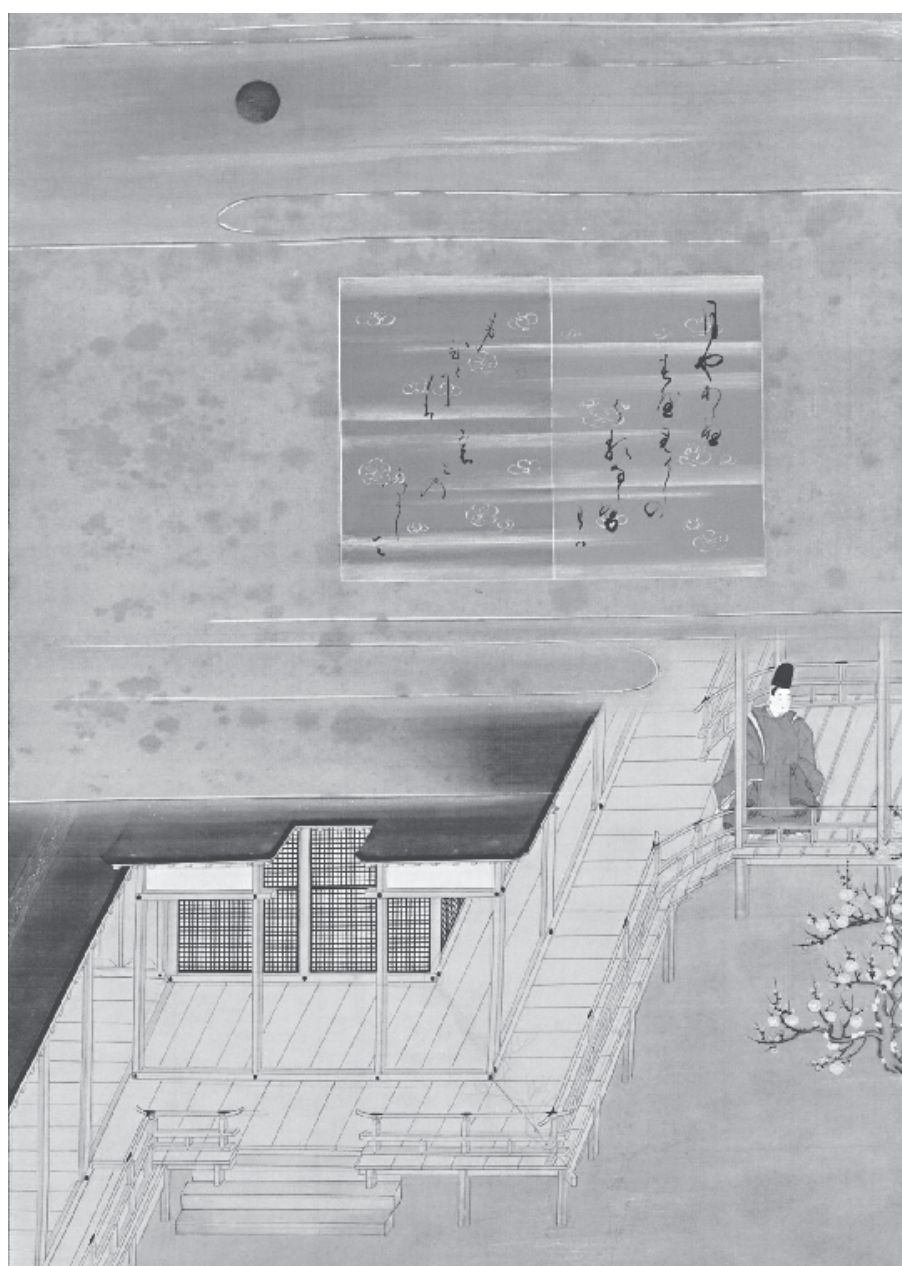
3

A Gift of Seaweed

Long ago, the man sent a gift of edible seaweed to a lady with whom he was in love, enclosing with it a poem:

If your love is true,
let us lie together.
Though this hut is poor,
we can **spread** out our sleeves
to make a bed.

The lady referred to was Her Majesty the Empress of the Second Avenue. This dates from the time when she was still a commoner, before entering the palace to become the emperor's consort.



Could that be the Same Moon?

The Spring of Old

Long ago, a lady was living in the western wing of the residence of Her Majesty the Empress Mother on the eastern side of the Fifth Avenue. In spite of himself, the man could not help but fall deeply in love with this lady and began to frequent her apartments. However, around the tenth day of the New Year, she suddenly vanished. The man discovered where she was, but it was not a place where ordinary people could go, so he was deeply unhappy.

At the beginning of spring in the following year, when the plum blossoms were at their peak, the man's heart was filled with poignant memories of the year that had passed, and he returned to the lady's former apartments. He gazed intently at his surroundings, now standing, now sitting down, but nothing looked as it had the year before. Bursting into tears, he lay down on the bare floorboards and remained there until the moon sank low in the sky.

Recalling the events of the previous year, he composed a poem:

Could that be the same moon?
Could this be the spring of old?
Only I am as I have always been,
but without you here

.....

Then, in the faint light of dawn, he returned home, weeping bitterly.

Nod Off to Sleep

Long ago, the man was secretly visiting a lady who lived on the eastern side of the Fifth Avenue. As he had to go there in stealth, it was impossible for him to enter by the main gate. So he visited her by crossing an earthen wall that had been damaged by children clambering over it. Not many people went there, but because of the frequency of his visits, word of his exploits reached the ear of the head of the house, who ordered a guardsman to watch over the place where he entered every night. So although the man visited again, he had to return home without seeing his beloved. His poem:

If only the watchman
guarding the secret path
that I take to you
would nod off to sleep
for a little while every night.

The lady was so distressed when she received the poem that the head of the house relented.

It is said that the man was secretly visiting the house of the future Empress of the Second Avenue, but because of gossip her brothers posted a guard.

Pearls of Dew

Long ago, the man pursued a lady for many years even though he had little chance of winning her. Finally, one pitch-black night, he stole away with her. As they were passing along the bank of the Akuta River, she caught a glimpse of dewdrops on the grass and asked, 'What are those?'

Although a long journey still lay ahead, night was deepening and peals of thunder punctuated the heavy rain. The man hid the lady deep within an empty storehouse, unaware that it was inhabited by demons. With his bow in hand and a quiver on his back, he stood guard at the entrance. But while he was wishing that morning would come, a demon swallowed the lady in one gulp. The lady had shrieked in terror, but the man had not heard her because of the thunder. As day slowly broke, he looked inside the storehouse and discovered that the lady was no longer there. Sprawling on his back and rubbing his feet together, he wept in anguish. But his grief came to nothing.

'Are those pearls,' you asked,
'or what might they be?'
I wish I had replied, 'Drops of dew,'
and vanished
as quickly as they do.

This story dates from the time when the lady, who later became Her Majesty the Empress of the Second Avenue, was still in the service of her cousin, a consort of the emperor. The man was so taken with the young lady's great beauty that he lifted her upon his back and ran away with her. Her older brothers, the Horikawa minister Mototsune and the Grand Counsellor Kunitsune, were at that time still of low rank. They happened to be on their way to the palace and heard a lady wailing. The two men stopped the abductor and rescued their younger sister. They are the demons of the tale. It is said that the lady was still very young at the time and had not yet attained imperial status.

7

The Returning Waves

Long ago, the man's life in the capital became too difficult to bear, so he set off towards the east. As he was walking along the beach on the border between Ise and Owari provinces, he saw the white waves rising and composed a poem:

The further I travel,
the more I long for the place
from whence I have come.
How I envy the ebbing waves,
returning home.

8

Mount Asama's Peak

Long ago, the man felt that his life in the capital had become unbearable, so, accompanied by a few companions, he set off towards the east to look for a new place to live. Observing smoke rising from the peak of Mount Asama in the province of Shinano, he composed a poem:

Look at all the smoke rising
from Mount Asama's peak.
People may look with reproach
for I too have revealed
my smouldering heart.

Departing for the East

Long ago, the man was overwhelmed by feelings of futility, and he thought, 'I can no longer remain in the capital; I will look for a suitable place to live in the provinces of the east.' Then he departed, taking a few of his old friends with him. Unsure of their way, they wandered along in a desultory fashion. Eventually they arrived at a place called Yatsushashi in the province of Mikawa. The location was known as Eight Bridges because the river there fanned out into eight channels like the legs of a spider, with a bridge across each one.

They dismounted in the shade of a tree by the edge of the marshland to eat some dried rice. In the marsh, there were beautiful irises in full bloom. One of the party said, 'Compose a poem on the topic "journey", using the letters I-R-I-S, one for the beginning of each line of the poem.' The man's poem:

In these familiar lovely robes I'm
Reminded of the beloved wife
I have left behind, stretching far—
Sadness, the hem of journeys.

Everyone wept, swelling the dried rice with their tears.

Continuing on their journey, they reached the province of Suruga. At Mount Utsu, the path was overgrown with maples and ivy and very dark and narrow. Just as the group were fearing that they might meet a terrible fate, they encountered a mendicant monk. 'Why are you travelling on a path such as this?' he asked them. On hearing him speak, the man realized that the monk was someone he knew. So he composed a poem for his beloved and gave it to the monk to take to the capital.



Iris in Bloom

Here by Mount Utsu
in Suruga so far away,
I cannot meet you
in the real world,
nor even in my dreams.

Then when he looked up and saw Mount Fuji, he noticed that even though it was midsummer, snow still covered the peak.

Mount Fuji,
knowing not the seasons,
which one do you think it is?
Snow still covers your peak—
the dappled coat of a fawn.

Compared to the mountains at the capital, Mount Fuji was like Mount Hie piled twenty times as high in the shape of a great mound of salt.

The man and his friends continued their journey and came to a large river on the border between Musashi and Shimosa. It was called the Sumidagawa. They rested together on the bank and thought forlornly about how far they had travelled. But the ferryman shouted, 'Get on board quickly! It's getting dark.' As they boarded the boat, they were all filled with sadness, for there was not one among them who had not left behind a loved one in the capital.

Just at that moment, they saw a white bird about the size of a snipe, with red legs and beak, frolicking on the water while gulping down a fish. As it was a bird that they had never seen in the capital, no one knew what it was. They asked the boatman what its name was, and he replied, 'Why, it's the "Bird of the Capital".' Hearing this, the man recited a poem.

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Snow Still Covers Your Peak

Bird of the Capital—
if true to your name,
then let me ask you
of the one I love;
is she still alive and well?

Everyone on the boat broke down in tears.

The Call of the Wild Goose

Long ago, the man wandered aimlessly until he reached the province of Musashi, and there he wooed a woman. The woman's father had his mind set on someone else for his daughter, but the mother favoured the man's suit, for she was determined to marry her daughter to someone of noble rank. The father was of ordinary stock, but the mother was a Fujiwara, which explains her preference for this nobleman. From where they lived in the village of Miyoshino in Iruma County, she sent a poem to the suitor:

I am sure that if the wild goose
on the rice fields of Miyoshino
is startled by a scarecrow,
she will fly with all her heart
calling out to you.

The suitor's reply:

From these rice fields
of Miyoshino,
how could I ever forget
the wild goose calling
just for me?

Even in the remote provinces, he remained true to his ways.

11

The Revolving Moon

Long ago, while journeying in the east, the man had a poem sent to his friends at home:

Though we are as far apart
as the drifting clouds,
do not forget me till we meet again,
for the moon that circles in the sky
will surely come around again.



Grasses of the Musashi Plain

12

Grasses of the Musashi Plain

Long ago, the man stole away with someone's daughter. This made him an abductor, and while he was fleeing with her to the Plain of Musashi, an order for his arrest was issued by the provincial governor. Before he was apprehended, he hid the girl in a grassy thicket. The pursuers exclaimed, 'We've been told the thief is hiding in this field,' and were about to set it aflame. In anguish, the girl cried out:

Please don't burn,
don't burn, the grasses
of the Musashi Plain.
My beloved hides here,
and I do, too.

The governor's men heard the girl and seized her; then both of them were marched off together.

13

Stirrups of Musashi

Long ago, when the man was living in Musashi, he wrote a letter to a lady in the capital: 'Should I tell you, it would make me blush; but should I not, I will feel miserable.' On the outside of the letter he inscribed the words 'Stirrups of Musashi'. After that, he sent no further word. But a while later, a poem arrived from the lady in the capital:

Stirrups of Musashi,
as I am still attached to you
like the buckles to your stirrups,
how hard not to hear from you
but more hateful when I do.

When the man read her poem, he could no longer bear it and replied:

When I write, you protest.
When I don't, you bear a grudge.
At times like this,
the Stirrups of Musashi
will surely die of a broken heart.

Cocooning with Silkworms

Long ago, the man wandered aimlessly until he reached the province of Michinoku. A woman who lived there must have thought a person from the capital a marvel indeed, for she fell head over heels in love with him and sent him a poem.

Rather than dying
from this one-sided love,
I wish I'd been born a silkworm
so that we could cocoon together
for even the shortest while.

Even though her poem was countrified, the man must have been moved by it because he went to spend the night with her. But when he left in the middle of the night, the woman exclaimed:

Wretched fowl!
When morning comes
I will dunk you in the pail,
for by crowing too early,
you drove my man away.

As he prepared to return to the capital, the man recited a poem:

Dear Pine Tree
of Aneha in Kurihara,
if only you'd been human
I would have said to you,
'Come, be my gift to the capital.'

However, the country girl completely misunderstood the meaning. Delighted, she repeated over and over again, 'He must be in love with me!'

A Pathway to the Heart

Long ago, when the man was in Michinoku, he began to visit the wife of a common fellow. To his surprise, she did not at all resemble the kind of person one expects to find in such circumstances. His poem:

At Mount Shinobu
if only there were a path
to visit you in secret,
that would also lead
to the core of your heart.

The woman thought the poem was splendid, indeed, but what could he expect to gain by peering into a poor countrywoman's heart?

Robes of a Heavenly Maiden

Long ago, there lived a courtier named Ki no Arisune who served three generations of emperors. For many years, he flourished, but in old age his fortunes declined with the changing times. He could no longer enjoy the prosperity even of an ordinary person. Yet his kindness, gentle nature and love of noble things distinguished him from others. And though he was forced to live in poverty, he behaved exactly as he had in the past, blissfully unaware of the difficulties of everyday life.

Eventually, his wife of many years stopped sharing his bed. She began to make preparations for becoming a nun and living with her older sister, who had already taken her vows. Ki no Arisune had not enjoyed a particularly close relationship with his wife, but because of her impending departure, he felt a deep affection for her surging within him. Sadly, he was too poor to do anything for her. Greatly troubled, he wrote of his difficulty to the man, who was his close friend: 'In short, my wife is leaving me for ever, but there is not the slightest thing I can do for her.' He ended the letter with a poem.

To tally the decades
we spent together,
she and I,
I count on my fingers—
one, two, three, four.

Reading this, Arisune's friend was deeply moved by his plight. He sent him not only a robe but also some bedding for his wife, together with a poem.

Dear Friend,
during the span
of forty long years,
your wife surely relied
so much on you.

Arisune replied:

What a gift you sent!

The celestial robes
of a heavenly maiden
that you wore in splendour
will now adorn a nun.

Then, still brimming with joy, Aritsune followed the first poem with another:

Has the autumn come?
There are so many drops
I confuse them with the dew,
but falling on my sleeves
are floods of joyful tears.

Fickle Blossoms

Once, after a long time, the man arrived at a certain house to see the cherry blossoms in full bloom. His host's poem:

Though fickle by repute,
these cherry blossoms
waited through the year
to share their beauty
with you, who rarely come.

The reply:

If I had not come today, by tomorrow
the blossoms would scatter like snow,
and even if they had not disappeared,
they would no longer look like flowers,
which fade the way your feelings do.

From White to Red

Long ago, a lady of affected ways was living near the man. As she was confident in her ability to write poetry, she decided to test him with a poem. She plucked a chrysanthemum that was turning a reddish colour as it faded and sent it to him with a poem.

On this blossom
where is passion's red?
For all I can tell
it is as pure as you—
a branch laden with snow.

Pretending that he did not understand the meaning of the poem, the man replied:

Surely the sleeve of the one
who plucked the chrysanthemum
is as beautiful as the flower,
hiding beneath its white
a sensual red.

19

A Raging Gale

Long ago, the man began to frequent the quarters of a lady who served at the palace. After a short time, their affair came to an end, but as they both served at court, the lady still saw the man often; he behaved as if she was not there. The lady's poem:

You grow as distant
as clouds in the sky,
yet all the while,
here before my eyes,
you are as plain as can be.

The reply:

If I am as distant
as clouds on high,
it is because of a gale
raging on the mountain
where I should like to be.

He sent the poem because the lady had begun to have an affair with another man.

No Such Thing as Spring

Long ago, the man fell for a lady of whom he had caught a glimpse in Yamato. He courted and won her, but after some time elapsed, he had to return to the capital, where he was in the service of the emperor. Though the end of spring was approaching, he picked a branch of beautiful red maple leaves on his way and sent them back to the lady with a poem.

I send you this to show
that though it may still be spring,
the leaves have taken on
an autumn red
deep as my love for you.

She timed her answer to arrive after he had returned to the capital.

Your love has faded as quickly
as autumn colours change.
Where you live,
is there no such thing
as spring?

Seeds of the Forgetting-Grass

Long ago, the man and a certain lady were deeply in love with each other and had eyes for no one else. But whatever happened, for some trifling reason, the lady despaired of their staying together and decided to leave him. She wrote the following poem on a wall in their house:

If I leave you,
people will surely say
I am thoughtless,
but it is because they know nothing
of the ways of the world.

Then the lady departed. When the man saw what she had written, he was bewildered. Breaking into tears, he thought, 'I can't understand. There was nothing that should have created such a distance between us. What could have caused this to happen?' Wondering where he should begin to look for her, he went out to the entrance gate and gazed all around, but he could find no sign of where she had gone. He returned home and composed a poem:

I have passed
all these years,
my pledge in vain.
Was this all there was
to our love?

Then he became lost in thought. His poem:

I do not know
whether you love me or not,
but a lingering image
of your beauty
haunts me more and more.

After a long time passed, no longer able to bear it, the lady sent the man a poem.

Surely you must think
it is time to let go of me,

but at least I pray you won't sow
seeds of the forgetting-grass
in the meadow of your heart.

The man replied:

If it was you who sowed
forgetting-grass seeds,
it would mean that you
had loved me up till now—
but you had no need to ...

Afterwards, they renewed their correspondence with even greater
ardour than before. Then the man sent another poem.

Filled with doubt
that once again
you may forget me,
I feel a sadness like nothing
I have ever known before.

The lady's reply:

I will disappear
from your life
like a cloud in mid-air
that vanishes in the sky
leaving not a trace.

In the end, despite their poetic interludes, they both took new lovers
and became estranged.

A Thousand Nights

Long ago, a romance that had scarcely blossomed came to a stop. But perhaps the lady could not forget her beloved, because she sent him this poem:

What misery!
But as I cannot forget you,
I have to admit
that though I hate you,
I also love you too.

The man replied, 'I told you so.' His poem:

As we are lovers,
let our hearts be one,
for though the island
parts the water
the river flows forever on.

Despite saying that, he went immediately to spend the night with her. They reminisced about the past and talked of their future. The man's poem:

If we could gather
a thousand autumn nights into one
and pass ten thousand
of these nights together,
would I ever tire of you?

The lady replied:

If a thousand nights
could be made into one,
I still could not tell you
all the ways I love you
before the cock began to crow.

From that time on, the man visited the lady with even greater passion.

The Measuring Well

Long ago, the children of some people living in the countryside used to play with one another in front of their well. But as they grew up, a young man and woman among them became bashful with each other. The young man wanted to take the woman as his wife, and she was equally determined to marry him, to the point that she refused when her parents tried to betroth her to someone else. Her suitor, who lived nearby, sent her a poem.

Since I saw you last
I have grown well beyond the rim
of our measuring well
where we compared our height,
but have you noticed yet?

The girl replied:

My hair that I compared
with yours as a child
now falls below my shoulders.
If not to wed you,
for whom shall I put it up?

The couple exchanged many such poems and, eventually, true to their wishes, became husband and wife.

But after some years passed, the wife's parents died, and the couple was left with no means of support. Realizing that they could not live in such miserable circumstances, the man took another wife in Takayasu in the province of Kawachi. His first wife saw him off without any apparent resentment, so her husband began to suspect that she had taken another lover. Pretending that he was going to Takayasu, he hid in the shrubbery of the garden and spied on her. Filled with melancholy, his wife applied her make-up with the greatest care and recited a poem.



The Measuring Well

As the wild winds blow
and the white waves rise,
I think of you
crossing Mount Tatsuta
all alone by night.

Hearing her, the man felt his heart fill with love, and he desisted from going to Takayasu.

Later, on a rare occasion when he happened to be back in Takayasu, the lady, who at first had behaved with great delicacy, abandoned all decorum. When he saw her take up the rice paddle and ladle the rice directly into the bowls of her household servants herself, he was filled with disgust and stopped visiting her. The lady's poem:

I pass my time gazing
at Mount Ikoma
beyond which you live,
so even when it rains
may clouds not cover it.

Then she gazed out in the direction of Yamato, where he lived.

After some time had elapsed, the man sent a message from Yamato: 'I will visit you.' She waited for him in joyful anticipation on many occasions, but he did not visit her. The lady wrote:

On so many nights
you said that you'd come,
but they have all passed by;
though I cannot believe in you,
my heart's still filled with love.

Despite her poem, the man never visited her again.

The Bow of the Crescent Moon

Long ago, the man was living in a remote part of the countryside. But, hoping to find employment at court, he decided to leave for the capital and parted sadly from his wife. Three years passed, and his wife despaired of his return. When another man expressed his love earnestly, she declared, 'Let us be one tonight.'

But on that very day, her former husband returned. 'Let me in, please,' he said, knocking on the door. Declining to open it, his wife composed a poem and slipped it out to him.

Three years have passed,
and, weary from waiting
for your return, on this very night
I will share a new pillow
with another man.

Her husband replied:

Like the bow of the crescent moon
my love for you has stretched
over all those months and years—
love your new husband
the way I loved you.

Then the man got ready to leave, but the lady cried:

However the string
of your bow may bend,
mine is stretched
towards you,
as always in the past.

Despite this poem, her husband departed. Heartbroken, the lady pursued him but could not catch up with him and eventually collapsed beside a spring. Using blood draining from her finger, she inscribed a poem on a rock nearby.

The time has come
for me to die as our hearts
are no longer one

and I could not stop you
from leaving me.

Then she breathed her last.

The Sleeves of Morning

Long ago, the man sent a poem to a lady, who neither refused him nor agreed to meet him.

The sleeves of morning may get wet
parting bamboo on the autumn plain
returning home from a night with you,
but what makes them wetter still
are all these nights alone.

The fickle lady replied:

Man of the sea,
searching till your legs are weary,
can you not see
that on the shores of my heart
no seaweed grows for you?

A Harbour in My Sleeves

Long ago, the man lamented to someone: 'I could not take as my beloved the lady who lived on the Fifth Avenue.' After receiving a reply, he wrote a poem.

How could I have imagined it?
Your kind words, like a towering ship,
come suddenly from China
making great waves of tears
in the harbour of my sleeves.

Frogs in Pairs

Long ago, the man spent a single night in the company of a lady and then did not visit again. One day, when the slatted bamboo cover had been removed from the lady's hand basin, she gazed at her reflection in the water. Her poem:

I had thought no one else
could be as wretched as I am.
But look—
under the water
there is another one.

As it happened, her erstwhile lover returned just then and, listening in secret, heard her poem. His response:

I must be the one
you caught sight of
where the water pools,
for even frogs in water
may cry in pairs.

Cupped Hands

Long ago, a fickle lady left a man. His poem:

Why has it become so hard
for us to be together?
For we had pledged our love,
like tightly cupped hands
that never let the water spill.



The Cherry Blossom Banquet

The Cherry Blossom Banquet

Long ago, the man recited a poem upon being summoned to attend the Cherry Blossom Banquet at the palace of the mother of the crown prince.

I never tire of the blossoms
that each year
I must bid farewell to,
but never with such poignancy
as I part from them tonight.

A String of Threaded Gems

Long ago, when the man was able to make love to a lady for only the most fleeting of moments, he sent her a poem:

Our encounter
was as short as the interval
on a string of gems;
so why has your heart
been cold for so long?

Sir Clump of Grass

Long ago, the man passed the apartment of a lady of high rank in the palace. The lady must have been feeling very hostile towards him, for she addressed him thus: 'Well, Sir Clump of Grass, let's see if you flourish or wither from now on.' The man retorted:

It is said forgetting-grass
will smother you if you curse
an innocent man,
and you yourself
will be the one forgotten.

Another lady present, overhearing his response, felt quite left out.

A Spool of Love

Long ago, the man sent a poem to a lady with whom he had been intimate some years earlier.

Like the threads of linen
that were spun upon a spool
in ancient times, can't we wind
back to the way we were,
and let the past be now?

His poem, however, seems to have made little impression on the lady.

Reed Ditty

Long ago, the man travelled to Ubara in the province of Settsu to see a lady with whom he was having a tryst. But one day as he prepared to return home, the lady became fearful that he would never visit her again. So the man composed a poem:

Just as the rising tide
covers the reeds
along the shore,
so love surges in my heart
with deepening thoughts of you.

The lady's reply:

Dear Boatman,
how could you plumb
with your simple pole
the depths of my heart
in its hidden cove?

How did her poem *read*? Was it a good poem or not for a countrywoman?

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Tempest

Long ago, the man sent a poem to a cold-hearted lady:

When I try to tell you, I fail,
but if I hold my silence
a tempest rages in my heart;
so it is only to myself
that I can grieve.

He seems to have swallowed his pride and bared his heart.

A Loosely Tied Knot

Long ago, the man sent a poem to a lady from whom he had become estranged against his wishes.

Our spirits are entwined
in a loosely tied knot
on a string of gems,
and though it has come undone
I long to see you still.

A Hardy Vine

Long ago, a lady reproached her lover, saying, 'It seems as if you have forgotten me.' The man's reply:

I have never felt
our bonds could sever,
for my love is like a hardy vine
that never stops its climb
up to the valley's peak.

Morning Glory

Long ago, the man was having a tryst with a fickle lady whose fidelity he doubted. His poem:

My love, do not undo
your undersash for anyone but me,
even if your feelings
fade like a morning glory
withering before dusk.

The lady's reply:

The undersash
we tied together,
I will not undo
by myself
till we meet again.

The Meaning of Love

Long ago, the man called on the home of Ki no Arisune. Arisune was out at the time and returned quite late, whereupon the visitor presented him with a poem:

I have learned from you
what it is
to feel like this.
Surely it is the yearning
people call love.

Arisune replied:

As even I have been one
always asking of others
what their views may be,
how could you learn from me
the meaning of love?

The Glow of Fireflies

Long ago, the Emperor of the Western Pavilion had a daughter named Takaiko. After she passed away, on the night of the funeral, the man, who lived next door, accompanied a lady in her carriage to watch the procession. The imperial cortège did not appear for a long time, and after weeping profusely the man was about to leave. Just then, Minamoto no Itaru, who was known as one of the most famous gallants in all the land, came to see the procession, and he noticed that the carriage they were in was one for ladies. Strolling up to it, he began to flirt with the lady within. Then he caught some fireflies and released them inside. Fearing that the lady's face could be seen by the glow of the fireflies, her companion inside the carriage tried to extinguish the light while reciting a poem:

When she is borne forth
it will be for the last time,
and like the flame of the firefly,
her light has gone out.
Can't you hear our cries of grief?

Itaru's reply:

The tears are sad, indeed,
but the light of her soul won't fade.
Though the firefly's flame goes out,
the beauty of your face
still shines within my heart.



The Glow of Fireflies

Itaru was the grandfather of Shitago. His poem was a mediocre effort from a person famous for his rakish behaviour. And it showed disrespect to Her Highness.

With All His Heart

Long ago, when the man was in his youth, he fell for an attractive girl in service in his parents' household. However, his disapproving parents, worried that he might form too deep an attachment, resolved to send the girl away. But despite their intent, they had not actually done so yet. The youth was still dependent on his parents and had no way to prevent them from getting rid of the girl. Nor did he have a strong will of his own. The girl was of low rank and equally powerless to resist.

In the meantime, the youth fell more and more deeply in love. Then, suddenly, the parents decided to get rid of the girl. The youth cried tears of blood, but there was nothing he could do, and she was taken away. He recited a poem through his sobbing:

It would not be so hard
if she had left by choice,
but as that is not so,
the pain I feel today surpasses all
I have ever known before.

Then he fell into a coma. This caused his parents great consternation, for though they knew that their son loved the girl, they had not realized the extent of his devotion and that it would make him physically ill. Utterly distraught, they prayed and made vows to the gods. The youth collapsed at sunset. It was not until the next day around eight at night that he revived. The young of long ago loved with all their hearts. Old men now, they could never be as passionate as that.

Purple Bonds

Long ago, there were two sisters. One married an impoverished man of inferior rank and the other a sophisticated man of high rank. On New Year's Eve, the wife of the low-ranking one washed her husband's formal wear. Then, she stretched the fabric by herself. She put her whole heart into it, but as she was unaccustomed to menial work, she ended up tearing a shoulder of the robe. There was nothing that she could do to remedy the matter, so she wept inconsolably. Her higher-ranking brother-in-law found her plight deeply affecting. Taking out a fine green robe of his own, he presented it to her with a poem:

Our bond is as deep
as the purple roots of spring,
and, to me, you and your sister
are inseparable
as budding grasses on the plain.

This poem was surely based on the 'Plain of Musashi' poem.

Treading on My Footprints

Long ago, the man exchanged vows with an amorous lady even though he knew perfectly well her reputation. Despite her ways, he was enchanted by her and visited her often. He worried incessantly about her infidelity, but because he felt as if his life depended on the affair, there was no way for him to resist visiting her. Once, when circumstances prevented him from seeing her for two or three days, he sent a poem:

I have just come home
and my footprints still remain,
but I wonder which suitor
treads back upon them now
on his way to you.

Thus he gave voice to his suspicions.

Where the Cuckoo Sings

Long ago, a prince named Kaya was very much in love with a lady and treated her kindly. But another man began to make advances to her, believing that he was her only suitor. Then yet another man, hearing of the attentions paid to her, sent her a poem with a drawing of a cuckoo.

Dear Cuckoo,
beloved of my heart,
how it pains me to see
you fly around and around
so many fields to sing.

Employing the same idea, the lady replied:

This morning I cry
because your fears are based
on ill-deserved rumours
that the cuckoo
sings in too many huts.

It was midsummer. The man replied:

Dear Cuckoo,
though you have many nests,
I love you still,
as long as I can always
hear you sing in mine.

Undo a Train

Long ago, the man hosted a farewell party for a friend who was departing for the provinces to take up an appointment. As the friend was close to the family, his wife had a servant serve him sake and made arrangements to present him with a complete set of ladies' robes. Then the host wrote a poem and had it attached to the belt of the train.

Dear Departing Friend,
I undo this train
from my robes for you,
so that misfortune won't undo
the train accompanying you.

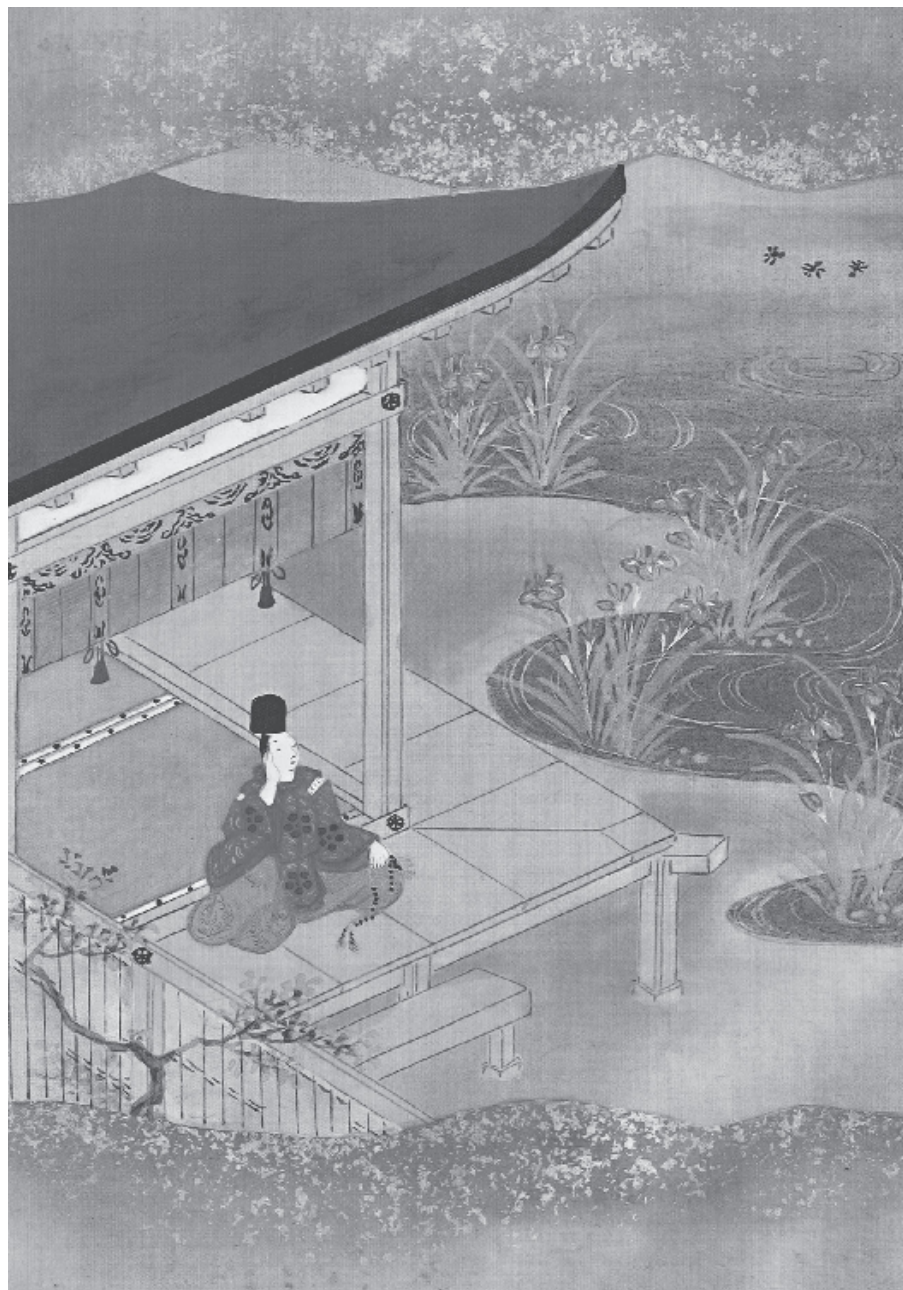
It was one of the most interesting of all the poems read on the occasion, and it was read aloud with deep feeling so that it could be savoured fully.

Fireflies, Please Tell the Wild Geese

Long ago, the daughter of a couple, who had been brought up with great care, wanted somehow to convey her love for a certain man. Perhaps it was difficult for her to put her feelings into words, and eventually she became gravely ill. As she lay dying, she confessed her love: 'This is the way I felt ...' Hearing of this, the weeping parents conveyed them to the man. Although he rushed to her home, the girl died, so the man shut himself away in idle musings. It was the last day of summer, and the weather was extremely hot. In the evening, he played music, and, as the night deepened, he felt a slightly cooler breeze coming on. Fireflies were flying high up into the sky. Lying on his side and gazing up at them, the man composed two poems.

Departing fireflies,
if you can rise to the heavens,
tell the wild geese that the breeze
that guides them home in autumn
has already begun to blow.

As I ponder
on this long summer day
that never seems to end,
my idle reveries are tinged
with inexpressible sorrow.



Fireflies, Please Tell the Wild Geese

A Special Friend

Long ago, the man had a dear friend. The two were deeply attached and all but inseparable. So when the friend had to go to live in the provinces, they parted sorrowfully. Some time later, a letter arrived, saying: 'How long has it been since we last met? The thought that you must have forgotten me makes me feel sad, but I suppose it is quite natural to forget someone whom one never sees.' The man's reply:

I feel no distance between us,
for there is not a moment
that I can forget you,
and the image of you
always fills my heart.

A Sacred Wand

Long ago, the man desired a lady from the bottom of his heart and wondered how he could make her his own. But the lady, hearing that he bestowed his affections indiscriminately, became ever colder towards him. Her poem:

There are as many hands
pulling at the sacred streamer
as there are ladies pulling at you,
so, though I may have feelings,
how could I have faith in you?

The man's reply:

I am as popular by repute
as the streamer wand cast on water,
but as it flows along
it will surely come to rest
in the ford of a single heart.

The One Who Waits

Long ago, the man prepared a farewell party, but having waited in vain for the guest to appear, he composed a poem.

At last I understand
how hard it is to wait
for someone whom one loves.
I shall never stop going to see
the one who waits for me.

New Grass of Spring

Long ago, the man was struck by the beauty of his younger sister. His poem:

How sad to think
that you will be someone else's.
As you are so young and pretty,
I would like to lie with you,
New Grass of Spring.

His sister replied:

To this First Grass of Spring,
what you say perplexes me,
for my love for you
has always been budding
with nothing but innocence.

Lovers' Quarrel

Long ago, the man returned the reproaches of a lady with yet another reproach:

Even if I could pile
a hundred eggs
on top of each other,
how could I love someone
who does not love me back?

The lady responded:

Though some drops may linger
after the dew of morning fades,
who could entrust her heart
to someone with feelings
as fleeting as yours?

The man retorted:

It would be harder
to place my trust in you
than to expect the winds
to have spared
the cherry blossoms of last year.



Writing on Water

The lady responded:

More futile
than writing numbers
on flowing water
is trying to love someone
who cannot return your love.

The man's reply:

Rapidly flowing waters,
scattering blossoms,
the passing years that age us so—
which of these would heed,
should we ask them to wait?

But though they each insinuated the other's infidelity, they were probably both involved in secret affairs with others.

Deep Roots

Long ago, the man planted chrysanthemums in someone's garden. His poem:

As I planted them firmly,
they will only fail to bloom
should autumn not come,
and even if the petals scatter,
may the plants always thrive.

Sweet Flags and Pheasants

Long ago, the man sent someone a poem in return for a gift of beautifully wrapped rice cakes:

Though you had to trudge
through marshes
to gather sweet flags,
my toil was no less harsh
hunting in the fields.

With the poem he sent a pheasant.

Heart of the Night

Long ago, the man was finally able to arrange an encounter with a lady who was somewhat difficult to meet. But while they were still talking, the cock crowed. The man's poem:

Why does the cock cry?
Not yet fulfilled,
my heart, teeming
with secret longings,
is still deep within the night.

The Path of Dreams

Long ago, the man sent a poem to a lady who was acting coldly towards him:

Is it dew falling from heaven
that drenches my sleeves?
No matter how I tread,
I cannot reach you,
even on this path of dreams.

The Things You Said

Long ago, the man composed a poem to a lady he still loved even though it seemed impossible that they could become one.

It may be true
you feel nothing for me,
but each time I recall
the things you said,
my heart still brims with hope.

An Inn of Dew

Long ago, the man endured the torments of love day and night, until his suffering overwhelmed him. His poem:

Though not a hut
thatched with grass,
as night approaches
my sleeve becomes an inn
where tears of dew lodge.

The Skeleton Shrimp

Long ago, the man sent a poem to a cold-hearted lady who was the source of his secret passion:

Just as the skeleton shrimp
sheds its brittle shell,
I, too, break into pieces
with torments of a love
that I brought on myself.

Demons and Gleanings

Long ago, there lived a man of refined taste and knowledgeable in affairs of the heart who built himself a residence in Nagaoka and settled there. In the house next door lived some rather fair ladies in the service of an imperial family member. This being the countryside, one day the ladies caught sight of the man setting off to oversee the rice harvesting in his fields. ‘My, what a *tasteful* occupation for such an *elegant* gentleman!’ they said, crowding into his house. The man escaped and hid in an inner room, whereupon one of the ladies recited a poem.

How sad indeed.
Many years must have passed
since this poor house
was deserted, for not a soul
comes out to greet us.

Then they sat down in his residence. The man sent a poem out to them:

Clamouring demons,
what makes this ruined house
choked in weeds so eerie
is your gathering here
even for the shortest time.

‘Shall we go, then,’ they called out, ‘and pick up the gleanings?’ But the man retorted:

I would gladly
join you in the fields
if it was hardship
that had forced you
to gather up the fallen grains.

Crossing the Straits of the Milky Way

Long ago, the man resolved to live in Higashiyama, though it was unclear what made the capital lose its appeal for him. His poem:

As life in the capital
is nothing but sorrow,
I will go look for a hut
in a mountain hamlet
where I can disappear.

But before long, he became very ill and lapsed into a death-like coma. However, when some water was splashed on his face, he revived and recited a poem.

Dewdrops touch my face.
I wonder if it is not the spray
from the oars of a boat
crossing the straits
of the Milky Way.

With that, he returned to the land of the living.

Mandarin Blossom

Long ago, the man's palace duties kept him so busy that he could pay little attention to his wife. Eventually, she went to live in a different province with another man, who promised that he would devote himself to her. Some time later, the former husband was sent to the Usa Shrine as an imperial envoy. On his way there, he learned that his wife had married one of the local functionaries who attended imperial envoys. He instructed him: 'Have your wife serve the sake cup, or I will not have any.' When his former wife did so, the envoy took a mandarin orange from among the delicacies that accompanied the sake and recited a poem.

The fragrance of mandarin
blossoming in summer
reminds me of the scented sleeves
of someone from the past
who was dear to me.

Memories of their life together flooded the woman's heart; she became a nun and went to live in a temple in the mountains.

The Colour of Love

Long ago, when the man was on his way to Tsukushi, he overheard a woman remark from behind a screen, 'Oh, *there's* that famous lusty gallant!' He responded with a poem:

Just like you,
are not all who cross
the River of Dyes
bound to be stained
by the colour of love?

The lady's reply:

Just as the place called
'Wanton Island'
is not true to its name,
so it's unfair to say
I am fickle in love.

Bare Branches

Long ago, there was a woman whose husband had not visited her for some years. She can't have been very clever for she trusted the words of an unreliable person and left her husband to work in someone's service in the provinces. One day, she happened to be called upon to serve her former husband something to eat. He said to the master of the house, 'When night comes, send me the woman who served me.' So the master of the house sent her to him. The man asked her, 'Didn't you know it was me?' He recited a poem.

What has become of the beauty
of your bygone days?
The cherry blossoms
have been stripped away,
leaving its branches bare.

The woman was so ashamed that she simply sat there, unable to reply. 'Why do you not respond?' the man asked, to which she answered, 'I am blinded by tears. I cannot speak.' The man recited another poem:

So this is how
it ended up!
How unkind the years
have been to you,
who fled from my love.

Then he removed his cloak and gave it to her, but she fled the house, leaving it behind. No one knows how she fared in the end.

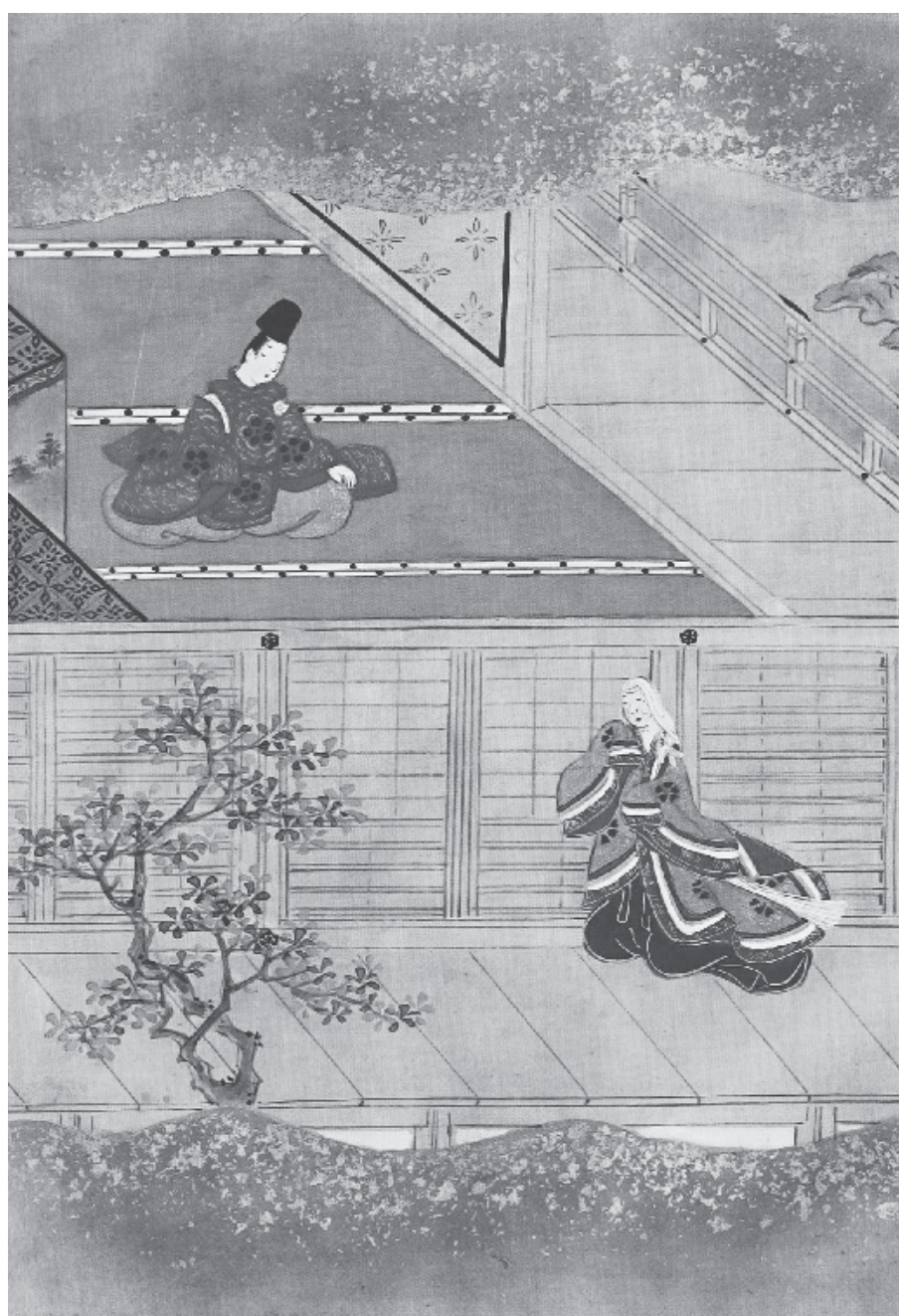
Love at a Hundred

Long ago, a woman who was experienced in the ways of love thought, 'If only I could meet a kind and sensitive man who would become my lover.' She had no way to let others know of her desire, so she invented a dream that she had not really had and called together her three sons to tell them about it. Two of her sons curtly dismissed her story, and for them that was the end of it. But her youngest son divined the dream and predicted to his mother: 'It means you will encounter a splendid man.' His mother was delighted to hear the good news.

The third son mused to himself: 'Most men are insensitive. If only I could arrange for my mother to meet the renowned Ariwara no Narihira.' So one day the young man waylaid Narihira when he was out hawking. Taking hold of the horse's bridle, he told him of his mother's feelings. Narihira was so moved by the story that he went and spent the night with the boy's mother. But he did not visit her again. Then the woman went to his house and was peering in at him when he caught a glimpse of her. His poem:

Just a year shy of a century,
 this woman with hair
 as white as it can be
 appears as a phantom
 seemingly in love with me.

When the woman saw him getting ready to come out of the house, she rushed home, catching herself on brambles and thorny shrubs on the way. When she arrived home, she lay down. Just as the woman had done to him, Narihira spied on her. Sighing, she recited a poem as she was preparing to go to bed.



Love at a Hundred

Spreading my robe for one
upon the narrow mat,
I wonder: tonight,
must I sleep again
without my love?

Moved by her plight, Narihira spent the night with the woman again.

As a rule, we show special affection only to those whom we truly love
and show no sign of love to others. But Narihira made no such fine
distinctions.

Becoming a Breeze

Long ago, the man could not arrange a secret tryst with a lady because he did not know where her quarters were. Wondering where on earth she could be, he had someone who knew her whereabouts deliver a poem to her.

If only I could
change myself into a breeze,
I would search for your chamber
and enter between the slats
of your beautiful blinds.

The lady replied:

Even if you were a breeze
that no one could hinder,
who would give you leave
to enter my chamber
through slats in the blinds?

The Young Love of Narihira

Long ago, there was a lady in service at the palace whom the emperor held in high esteem. A cousin of the Empress Mother, she had been granted permission to wear forbidden colours. A very young man from the Ariwara family was serving in the Privy Chamber of the palace at the time, and he began to visit this lady. He had permission to keep company with the ladies, and he went to their quarters and sat directly in front of the lady, for which she remonstrated with him: 'This behaviour is most improper. It will destroy us if you keep on like this. You must stop it.' The youth responded with a poem:

My endurance has lost out
to my love for you.
If we could meet for just a night,
I do not care one bit
what will become of me.

When the lady heard these words, she returned to her private quarters. As usual, the youth, oblivious to the stares of others, followed her to her quarters and lingered there. Deeply distressed, the lady then returned to her home. 'What a great opportunity,' thought the youth, and, much to everyone's amusement, he started to see her there. Early the following morning, in full view of the palace servants of the Housekeeping Bureau, he threw his shoes deep inside the building before he entered the palace.

This unseemly state of affairs went on for some time, until at last the youth realized that his behaviour might ruin him, even at the cost of his life. So he prayed to the buddhas and the gods, 'What am I to do? I beg you to rid me of this desperate love.' Despite his prayers, his desire grew stronger still, until he could not bear his tortured longing. So he summoned the diviners and priestesses of the shrine and had them prepare the utensils for a purification ritual to release him from his obsession. As the ritual progressed, he felt a great sadness, and his longing surged more intensely than ever before. His poem:



Purge Me of My Love

Oh, dear. The gods rejected
these rites of purification
performed beside
the cleansing waters
to purge me of my love.

After the rites he returned home.

The emperor was splendid in both looks and figure. Listening to him chanting devoutly the Buddha's name in his resonant voice moved the lady to bitter tears. She sobbed, 'What cruel karma, to be bound as I am to that youth and so unable to serve His Majesty with all my heart.' Eventually the emperor got wind of the affair and banished the youth. His mother expelled the lady from the palace, locked her up in a storehouse and gave her a good scolding. The imprisoned lady wept:

It was indeed my own fault
I was caught like a skeleton shrimp
in seaweed gathered by fisherfolk.
So let me raise my voice and cry,
but blame no one but me.

The youth returned from his place of exile to visit the storehouse every night. He played the flute beautifully and sang in a refined and moving voice. The imprisoned lady knew that he was there, but there was no way for her to meet him. Her poem:

He has no idea that in here
I am hardly still alive.
How sad for me,
knowing he still thinks
we could meet again.

Those were her thoughts.

As the lady could not come to him, the youth roamed around, then returned to the distant province, singing:

Though all in vain
I come and go.
Longing for you,
I am drawn back
again and again.

This story dates from the reign of the Mizunoo Emperor. The Empress Mother is said to have been the Somedono Empress or, according to other accounts, the Empress of the Fifth Avenue.

The Sea of Life

Long ago, the man had an estate in the province of Settsu; once he went on an outing to Naniwa. He was accompanied by his older and younger brothers and some friends. Gazing out at the ships along the shore, he composed a poem.

This very morning
Naniwa Bay comes into view—
inlets dotted with ships
carrying us across
the sorrow-filled sea of life.

Deeply moved by the poem, everyone left for home.

Snow Blossom

Long ago in mid spring, the man took his close friends on an outing to the province of Izumi. On the way, in the province of Kawachi, they saw Mount Ikoma swathed in billowing clouds, which then cleared, rose and trailed along the sky, constantly changing. Though it was cloudy all morning, at midday the sky cleared, and pristine white snow lay upon the branches of the trees. They gazed upon the scene, but the man alone of his party recited a poem.

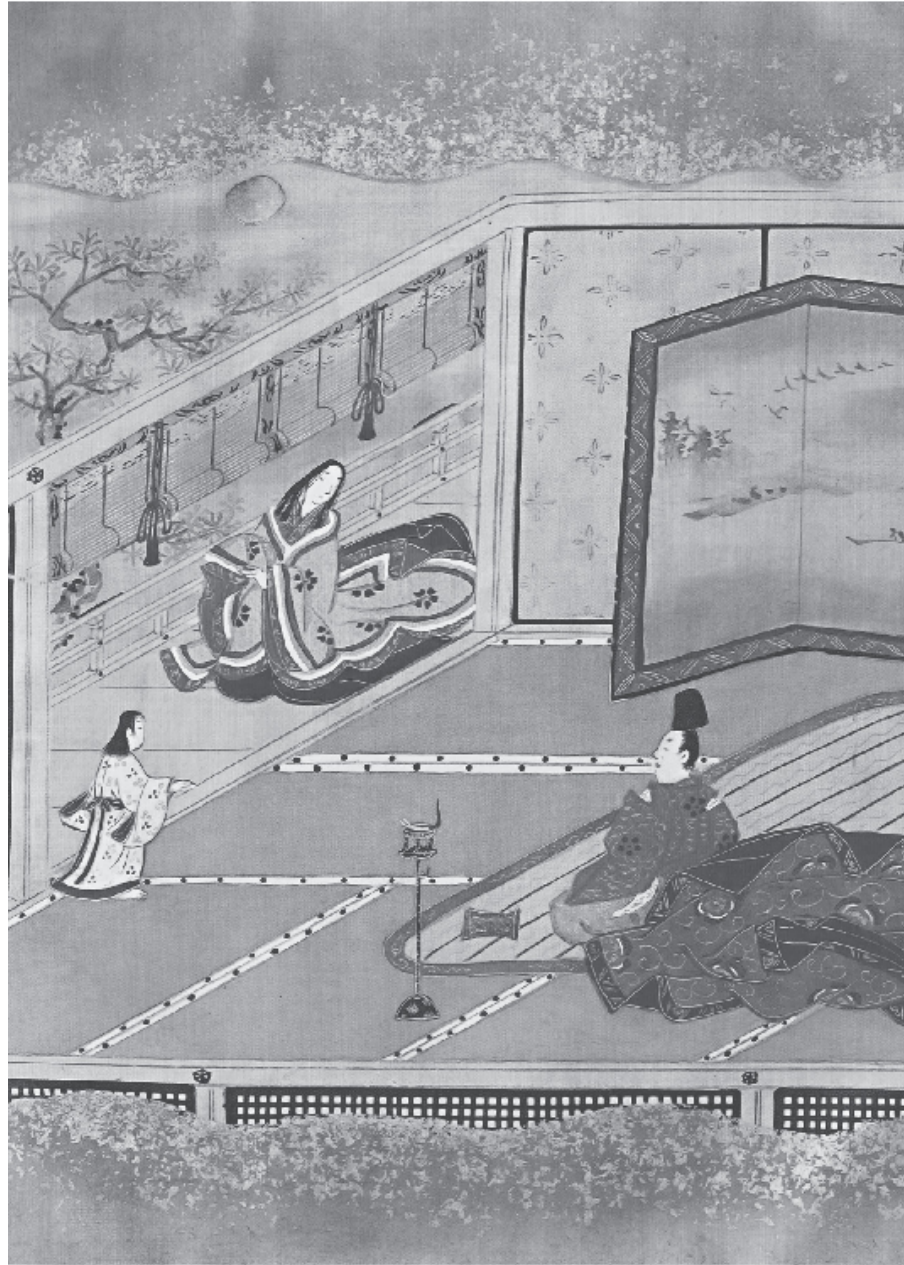
Yesterday, today
the billowing clouds
hid this sight from view,
not wishing to share with us
the woods in snow blossom.

The Place to Dwell

Long ago, the man went to the province of Izumi. As he headed for the Sumiyoshi beach, in Sumiyoshi village, in the county of Sumiyoshi, he was so moved by the scenery that he dismounted from his horse and sat down again and again to enjoy the lovely views. One of his party proposed: 'Compose a poem with the phrase "the shore of Sumiyoshi" in it.' The man's poem:

In autumn wild geese cry
and chrysanthemums bloom,
but by the sea in spring
the shore of Sumiyoshi
is the place to dwell.

Hearing this, no one else in the party was inclined to compose a poem of his own.



Was It Real, or Just a Dream?

Was It Real, or Just a Dream?

Long ago, the man travelled to the province of Ise in his role as imperial huntsman. The mother of the Priestess of the Ise Shrine sent word to her daughter: 'You must take better care of this man than you would of some ordinary envoy.' Mindful of her mother's request, the priestess lavished attention on the visitor. In the morning, she helped him prepare for hawking, saw him off and then had him return to her residence in the evening. In this way she entertained him with the greatest solicitude.

On the second night, the man said, 'No matter what, I must see you alone.' The Priestess of Ise was not averse to the idea, but as there were so many who could have seen them, it was impossible. As the huntsman was the most senior member of his party, the priestess arranged for him to be lodged in a place not too far from her sleeping chamber. And as he was very close by, she went to him just before midnight, when everyone was asleep. The man had been unable to sleep and was lying on his side gazing outdoors. The priestess appeared in the faint light of the moon, with a little page girl standing before her. Delighted, the man led them into his sleeping chamber. Yet though he and the priestess were together from midnight until almost three in the morning, she left without saying a word. The next morning, despite his apprehension, it was impossible to send a message to her, so the man waited in a state of great anxiety. Some time after dawn, a poem came from the priestess without any letter to accompany it:

Was it you who came to me,
or I who went to you?
I cannot tell.
Was I awake or sleeping?
Was it real, or just a dream?

The man, breaking into a flood of tears, replied:

In my chaotic heart of darkness
I also cannot tell.

Come again tonight,
and let us decide
if it was a dream or real.

After sending the poem to the priestess, he left for the hunt. Although he went to the open fields, he could hardly concentrate. He thought, 'After everyone goes to sleep tonight, I want to see her as soon as possible.' But the governor of Ise, who also administered the priestess's household, came to know that an imperial huntsman had arrived on a hawking expedition and entertained him with sake all through the night. The huntsman could not arrange another tryst with the priestess, as the next morning his party was to leave for Owari. He shed tears of blood in secret, but he could not meet her again.

As the night was giving way to morning, the priestess sent the huntsman a cup of sake with a poem written on the inside. He picked up the cup and read the poem.

Traveller, your hem hardly got wet
crossing the river, shallow
as what was between us ...

This was all that was there; the last two lines were missing. Taking up a pine torch, with its charred tip, the man completed the poem on the sake cup:

... but I will cross the Meeting Barrier
to meet you once again.

At dawn, he set off for the province of Owari.

The priestess, who served during the reign of the Mizunoo Emperor, was the daughter of Emperor Montoku and Prince Koretaka's youngest sister.

Sea-Tangle

Long ago, on his way home from an imperial hawking expedition, the man lodged at Oyodo Crossing. There he recited a poem to one of the female attendants of the Priestess of Ise:

Fisher girl in your boat,
show me with your pole
where I can find **see-tangle**,
for by the **sea-we'd** meet,
me and the one I love.

Traversing the Sacred Fence

Long ago, the man paid a visit to the Priestess of Ise in his capacity as an imperial envoy. In the palace, one of the priestess's ladies flirted with him, reciting a poem to express her own feelings.

Imperial messenger
from the splendid palace,
I so long to be alone with you
that I may traverse
the sacred fence of the raging gods.

The man's reply:

If you love me
then please come,
for the raging gods
do not rail against
the ways of love.

The Pine of Oyodo

Long ago, the man tried unsuccessfully to arrange a further tryst with a lady in the province of Ise. Before he departed for a neighbouring province, he expressed his deep resentment to her. But the lady replied:

It is not the Oyodo pine
that is cold-hearted.

It is the resentful waves I blame,
for with just a glance upon the bay
they quickly retreat again.

Within the Moon

Long ago, the man was in love with a lady whose whereabouts he knew, but he could not even send her a letter. His poem:

I can see you so clearly,
but never touch you
with my hands,
for you are as far away
as the laurel tree within the moon.

Piling up like Rocks

Long ago, the man felt great resentment towards a lady. His poem:

It is not that I must cross
mountains covered in rocks
to see you,
but because we seldom meet
my longing piles up and up.

‘See-Weed, See-Shells’

Long ago, the man proposed to a lady, ‘Let me take you to the province of Ise so we may live there together.’ The lady’s reply:

Just as the ‘seaweed’ of Oyodo
contains the sound ‘see’,
just seeing you
will be enough for me,
without any need for vows.

And she became even colder than before. The man’s response:

My sleeves are drenched
like those of the fishermen
harvesting seaweed.
Should just seeing you be enough
without ever being one with you?

The lady retorted:

Just as the tides flow in and out
and seaweed always grows
between the rocks,
just seeing me may bring forth
good things, plentiful as shells.

The man’s reply:

Wringing my sleeves
soaked with tears, I ask—
is your cold heart
made of the drops
that drench my sleeves?

This lady was indeed difficult to court.

The Age of the Gods

Long ago, the Empress of the Second Avenue, then still known as the consort mother of the crown prince, departed on a pilgrimage to the august shrine of her ancestral deities. As she was bestowing gifts upon those present, an elderly man in service in the Imperial Guard humbly received his gift directly from her carriage. He had a poem presented to her.

On this auspicious day
the god of Mount Oshio at Ohara
must be recalling with delight
the Age of the Gods and maybe even
something ancient in our past as well.

Was it some deep sorrow that was troubling him? What were his feelings? No one knows.

The Parting of Spring

Long ago, there was a sovereign known as the Tamura Emperor, who had a consort named Takakiko. After she passed away, memorial services were held for her at the Anshoji Temple. The participants made many offerings, and about a thousand of these were gathered together. Many were displayed on branches placed before the temple, making it seem as if a whole mountain covered in trees had moved there. When the ceremony was over, the Commander of the Right, Fujiwara Tsuneyuki, summoned some people who were known to write poetry well and instructed them to compose poems to commemorate the ceremony while evoking the spirit of spring. The elderly Chief Equerry of the Right mistook this mountain for a real one and composed a poem on it:

A whole mountain
has moved here today
to mourn a great lady
who parts from us—
at the parting of spring.

Nowadays, when one looks at the poem, it does not seem particularly remarkable. But at the time, it was praised by everyone. Could it have been better than all the other ones composed on that occasion?

The Heart Has No Colours

Long ago, after an imperial consort named Takakiko passed away, a memorial service was held for her on the forty-ninth day at the Anshoji Temple. The Commander of the Right, Fujiwara Tsuneyuki, attended the service and, on his way home, made a visit to pay his respects to the cloistered prince, who had retired to Yamashina. The prince's residence had a beautifully designed garden with a waterfall and a stream. Tsuneyuki greeted him respectfully: 'All these years I have only been able to serve you from a distance and never attended you in person, so tonight I am at your service.'

The prince expressed great delight and had his guest's sleeping quarters prepared. In the meantime, the commander came outside with a plan in mind and said to his servants, 'As this is the first occasion that I wait upon His Highness, it should not pass without some demonstration of my esteem. When His Majesty visited my father's Third Avenue residence someone presented him with a splendid stone from the beach of Chisato in the province of Ki. But it arrived after his return, so the stone was later placed in a stream in front of a certain person's room. As His Highness has a great love of gardens, let us present him with this stone.' With this, he directed his guardsmen and servants to fetch the gift. In no time at all, they returned with the stone, which was even finer than he had heard.

Thinking that it would be a shame to present it without some accompaniment, the commander had his retainers compose poems for the occasion. He chose the poem by the Chief Equerry of the Right; then he had the moss scraped away from the surface of the stone to form the characters of the poem. They stood out as if embossed on gold lacquer. The stone was presented to His Highness with the poem:



The Heart Has No Colours

Though it is hardly enough,
all I can do is to present you
with this stone,
for the heart has no colours
to illustrate one's feelings.

The Shelter of Bamboo

Long ago, the Ariwara clan was blessed by the birth of a prince. To celebrate the occasion, everyone composed poems. Narihira, the grandfather, who was advanced in age, composed this one:

By our gate we have planted a bamboo
a thousand feet high;
through summer and winter,
who among our clan
will not be blessed by its shelter?

The infant was Prince Sadakazu. Though people at the time spread a rumour that he was the son of Narihira, actually the prince's mother was the daughter of Middle Counsellor Yukihiro, Narihira's brother.

Wisteria Blossoms

Long ago, there lived a man from a house of declining fortunes; he had a wisteria vine in his garden, and on one of the last days of spring, as a gentle rain fell, he plucked some blossoms from the vine. These he presented as a gift to a certain person along with a poem:

Not minding at all
that I would get wet,
I picked these blossoms for you
because I knew
but a few days of spring remain.

Sailing into a Garden

Long ago, a certain Minister of the Left built himself a very sophisticated house beside the Kamo River on the Sixth Avenue and took up residence there. It was approaching midwinter, when the colour of the fading chrysanthemums was at its peak, and the leaves blazed in many shades of red. The Minister of the Left invited some imperial princes to a party, and they drank and played music throughout the night. When dawn broke, everyone recited a poem in praise of their host's residence. There was an old tramp present, walking around under the viewing stands, and after all the guests had finished reciting their poems, he recited one of his own:

Without knowing how,
suddenly I find myself
at Shiogama by the sea.
Let the fishing boats sail in
on the morning calm.

On his trip to Michinoku, the old man had seen many beautiful and intriguing places. His Majesty's realm has over sixty provinces, but there is nowhere as beautiful as Shiogama in Michinoku. Thus to lavish praise on the minister's garden, the old man began his poem with the lines: 'Without knowing how, / suddenly I find myself / at Shiogama by the sea.'

The Heart of Spring

Long ago, there lived an imperial prince named Koretaka. He had a residence in Minase beyond Yamazaki, where he went every year when the cherry blossoms were in full bloom. He was always accompanied by the Chief Equerry of the Right, but such a long time has passed that no one remembers his name.

While in Minase, the two hawked but without much enthusiasm. For the most part, they devoted themselves to drinking and composing poems in the Japanese style. During one hawking expedition in Katano, the cherry blossoms in bloom at the Nagisa mansion were exquisite. The hunting party dismounted under the trees and, breaking off sprigs of blossom, they placed them in their hair. Members of the high, middle and low ranks all composed poems. The equerry's poem:

If only there were
no cherry blossoms
in this world,
what calm would reign
in the heart of spring.

Then someone else recited:

It is because
the blossoms scatter
that they are splendid.
In this world of sorrow,
what lasts for long?



The Heart of Spring

Dusk was approaching as they set out from under the trees. The prince's attendants appeared from somewhere afield, followed by servants bearing sake. Someone among them said, 'Let's drink it all!' and the whole party went looking for a good location to savour it. They came upon the River of Heaven. The chief equerry was about to serve a cup of sake to His Highness, but the prince declared, 'Before you serve me the sake, compose a poem on the topic "Coming upon a bank of the River of Heaven after hawking at Katano".' The chief equerry did as instructed and composed a poem, which he recited for the prince:

Having hunted all day,
let's ask the Weaving Maid
to put us up
here upon the banks
of the River of Heaven.

The prince recited the poem aloud over and over again, but could not make a poem in reply. So Ki no Arisune, who was also a member of the party, composed a reply in his stead:

Because the Maid waits
for her lover who comes
but once a year,
she will hardly allow
another man to stay.

The imperial party returned home then, and the prince entered the palace. The whole party drank and talked far into the night, until their host, the prince, became quite intoxicated and prepared to retire to his chambers. The moon of the eleventh night was about to disappear behind the hills, and the chief equerry recited a poem.

Dear Moon,
as we still long to gaze on you,
must you disappear so soon?
Would that the mountain rims flee
and refuse to take you in.

Then Ki no Arisune recited a poem in His Highness's stead:

Would that every peak
be flattened,
for if all the ridges disappeared,
I, the Moon,
would have no place to hide.

Toiling Through Snow

Long ago, Prince Koretaka made a regular habit of visiting his residence in Minase, and on his hawking trips there he was always accompanied by the elderly chief equerry. Once, after spending some days there, the prince returned to his palace in the capital. The equerry accompanied the prince back to his palace as usual and made preparations to go home as soon as possible, but the prince detained him with sake and the promise of a gift. The equerry, trying to discover what his true wishes might be, composed a poem for him.

I have no need to sleep on a pillow
made from bound grasses,
for unlike the autumn nights,
this one we spend together
will pass too soon.

It was the last day of spring, and in the end he attended His Highness all through the night until dawn.

The equerry always served the prince well in this way; but one day the prince unexpectedly took the tonsure and became a monk. At the New Year, the equerry went to Ono at the foot of Mount Hie to pay him his respects. Snow was piled deeply everywhere, but at last he reached the prince's retreat and greeted him. The prince appeared bored and dejected, so the equerry stayed by his side for some time, regaling him with memories of their past. The equerry would very much have liked to stay on and serve him in this manner, but duty called, so when it grew dark, he prepared to leave. His poem:

When I forget our fate,
I wonder if it is not a dream—
for how could I have imagined
I would have to toil so far in snow
to see my beloved prince.

He returned to the capital, weeping bitterly.

A Son's Wish

Long ago, there lived a man who, though not of high rank, was the son of an imperial princess who resided in Nagaoka. The man was in service at the capital, so he was unable to visit her as often as he wished. Because he was her only son, his mother loved him dearly. Around the end of the year, he received a letter from her with word that the content was urgent. Alarmed, he looked inside the envelope and found a poem.

Another year older,
I face a parting
they say no one can avoid—
how it makes me long
to see you, my beloved son.

Weeping sadly, he composed a reply:

How I wish the parting
that no one can avoid
would vanish from the world,
not least for this son, who prays
you will live a thousand years.

My Heart's the Snow

Long ago, a certain man had served a prince since childhood, but one day his patron took the tonsure and became a monk. As the man held a position at the palace, he could not visit his patron often, but he never lost his sense of devotion and always went to pay his respects at New Year. All the prince's former attendants, both laymen and clerics, would also gather then and, as it was a special day, the prince would serve sake to everyone. On one particular New Year snow fell heavily all day. Everyone became quite drunk and composed poems on the topic of being snowbound. The man's poem:

Though I yearn to be at your side,
I cannot split myself in two;
but today my heart's the snow
that, piling up,
keeps me here with you.

The prince was so moved by the poem that he removed his robe and gave it to the man.

Past Loves

When the man was still a youth, he fell in love with a girl. But, being dependent on their parents and fearing their reaction, they did not pursue it. Years later, perhaps trying to revive their love, the man composed a poem and sent it to the lady.

After many years
everyone else
forgets past loves
and goes their separate ways.
Have you done so, too?

That, however, was the end of the matter. At the time, the man and the lady were serving close to each other in the same household.



Are Those Stars on a Cloudless Night?

Travels in Ashiya

Long ago, the man went to live on an estate that he owned in Ashiya in Ubara County in the province of Tsu. It is the same place that appears in this old poem about Nada in Ashiya:

At Nada in Ashiya
 I was too busy
 burning salt fires
 to put a comb in my hair,
 but look – I'm here!

The man had a minor post at the palace, and his older brother was the commander of the guards, so some junior officers of the Imperial Guard came to pay him a visit. They were taking a leisurely stroll on the beach in front of the house when one of them proposed, 'The Nunobiki Waterfall is said to be at the top of that mountain. Shall we go to see it?' With that, the party climbed the mountain and found that it was no ordinary waterfall. The rock face was a good two hundred feet high and fifty feet wide, and the water pouring over it made it look as if its whole surface were covered in rippling white silk. A rock the size of a round straw mat jutted out from the top of the falls, and water cascaded over it in huge drops the size of chestnuts and mandarin oranges. The man invited everyone there to compose a poem on the waterfall. The first to recite a poem was the commander of the guards.

Will my time ever come?
 Waiting without hope,
 I wonder which is greater,
 the deluge of water
 or the fall of my tears.

Then the host recited a poem.

Someone is surely unstringing
 myriad drops that scatter
 like cascading pearls,
 but my narrow sleeves
 could never hold them all.

Did those present find the poem amusing? It is not clear, but at any rate they praised it highly and desisted from creating poems of their own.

It was a long way home, and twilight was coming on when they passed the residence that had belonged to Mochiyoshi, the late head of the Imperial Household. Looking ahead in the direction of their home, they could see fires on the sea for luring fish. The host recited a poem.

Are those stars on a cloudless night
or fireflies on the riverbank,
or are they the lights
of the fishermen's fires
in the direction of our home?

Then they went home. During the night, a southerly wind blew up, and the waves were very high. Early the next morning, the servant girls at the host's house went out and gathered seaweed that had washed ashore and brought it back to the house. The woman of the house served it on a high-stemmed tray with an oak leaf placed on top. A poem was written on the leaf:

Though he treasures the seaweed
for adorning his hair,
the god of the sea
presents it to you, my lord,
with all his heart.

Was this a good poem or not for a country dweller?

The Rounds of the Moon

Long ago, a group of friends who were not so young any more gathered to admire the moon. One of them composed a poem:

Most of the time
I do not delight
in watching the moon,
for with each round it makes,
the older we become.

Which God Would They Blame?

Long ago, the man, not of low rank himself, longed for many years for a lady of a rank even higher than his own. His poem:

What a shame to die
of my unrequited love
without others knowing why.
Believing it a curse of some kind,
which god would they blame?

By Tomorrow ...

Long ago, the man spent a long time trying to convey his feelings to a cold-hearted lady. Perhaps the lady took pity on him, for she sent word saying, 'Well, tomorrow I can meet you, but only from behind a screen.' The man was overjoyed, though at the same time he doubted her true feelings. He attached a splendid spray of cherry blossoms to a poem and sent it to her.

Dear Blossoms,
so exquisitely
in bloom today,
will you still be like this
by tomorrow night?

It is not surprising that he felt this way.

The Last Day of Spring

Long ago, the man composed a poem lamenting the passage of time. It was the end of spring.

However I may lament,
today is the last day
of spring,
and already
twilight is upon us.

Hidden by Reeds

Long ago, fuelled by a burning desire, the man went to the dwelling place of his beloved many times without even being able to deliver a letter to her. His poem:

Hidden among the reeds
I am like a little boat
rowing back and forth,
back and forth,
but you never notice me.

Love Between the Ranks

Long ago, the man, who was low in rank, fell for a lady of a rank well beyond his own. But perhaps the lady had given him small reason for hope, because he longed for her when awake and even in his sleep. Consumed by this longing, he composed a poem.

When you love,
love your equal,
for the gulf between
high and low runs deep
with suffering beyond compare.

Even in the old days, were such things commonplace?

Autumn Leaves and Spring Blossoms

Long ago, for an unknown reason the man stopped living with his wife. After some time, the lady took up with another man. But she had a child by the first husband, so, although they were no longer close, she kept in touch with him. The lady painted, and the former husband once sent her a request to paint a picture for him. She replied that her new husband was with her and did not send him a painting for several days.

The former husband sent word, saying, 'How cold of you not to do what I asked you! Maybe such behaviour is quite natural for you, but it's also natural that I should resent it.' And, teasing her, he sent a poem. The season was autumn.

On these long nights
you forget spring days.
Are you wrapped up
in autumn fogs much thicker
than the mists of spring?

The lady's reply:

A thousand autumn nights
can't compare to a single spring with you.
But as for being short-lived,
autumn leaves and spring blossoms
scatter just the same.

The Herd Boy's Star

Long ago, the man was in the service of the Empress of the Second Avenue. He would constantly see a lady who was also in service there, and he began to court her. He said to her, 'I've been so vexed with burdensome thoughts. Even if only before a screen, please find a way for me to meet you, so that I might clear my heart.' Accordingly, the lady met him very discreetly with a screen between them. During their conversation, the man recited a poem.

My love shines brighter
than the Herd Boy's star,
and though the barrier between us
is not as great as the Milky Way,
please tear it away now.

Deeply affected, the lady permitted him to pass the night in her company.

Boils and Curses

Long ago, the man courted a lady for quite some time, but in the end, as she was made of neither wood nor stone – and perhaps feeling a little sorry for him – she gradually began to return his affections. Alas, by then it was around the middle of the last month of summer, and several boils broke out on her body.

The lady sent word to the man, ‘I have a heart for none but you. But I am suffering from one or two boils, and the hot weather is dreadful. I am sure we will be one when the breezes of autumn begin to blow.’ But while the would-be lovers were waiting for autumn to come, rumours spread that she was going to live with him, and her older brother suddenly came to take her away. The lady had a servant fetch her a maple leaf that had just begun to turn colour. She composed a poem and wrote it on the leaf to give to the man.

I promised to be with you in autumn,
but it could not come to pass,
because what was between us
was like a stream made shallow
from piled-up leaves.

Then she left, giving instructions, ‘If a messenger comes from that man, please give this to him.’ To this day, no one knows what became of her or whether she ended up happily. No one even knows where she went. It is said that her suitor, gesturing with his hands, made a curse. What a macabre thing to do! Do curses really affect those cursed? It is said that the suitor remarked, ‘We’ll soon find out!’

Old Age, Don't Come!

Long ago, there was a nobleman known as the Horikawa minister. On the occasion of the celebrations for his fortieth birthday at his Ninth Avenue residence the elderly captain of the Imperial Guard composed a poem.

Cherry blossoms,
scatter in blizzards
so that old age
cannot tell the path
on which to come.



Blooms of Devotion

Blooms of Devotion

Long ago, there lived a certain chancellor. At the end of autumn, one of his retainers presented him with an exquisitely crafted replica of a sprig of plum blossom with a pheasant tied to it. With the gift came a poem:

Though the seasons
will come and go,
the blossoms I present to you
bloom throughout the year—
just like my devotion.

The chancellor was truly delighted and bestowed a reward upon the messenger.

A Glimpse or Not

Long ago, on the occasion of an archery meet at the riding grounds of the guards of the Right, the captain of the Imperial Guard caught the faintest glimpse of a lady's face through the silk curtain in the carriage opposite his own. He sent her a poem.

I have been enchanted
by someone I am not sure
I have even glimpsed or not,
so I spend this day longing,
lost in melancholic reverie.

The lady's reply:

From just one glimpse,
how can you rashly judge
what you might know of me?
Let your feelings be the signpost
to the pathway of my heart.

Later, he found out who she really was.

Longing-Grass

Long ago, the man was making his way along a passageway inside the Koryoden Pavilion in the palace. From a chamber there, a certain high-ranking lady had some forgetting-grass passed out to him with a question, 'Are you trying to call these "longing-grasses"?' Receiving them, the man responded:

You may think I am
like a wild field where only
forgetting-grass grows,
but I am a field of longing-grass,
longing for you for evermore.

Glorious Wisteria

Long ago, there lived a man named Ariwara no Yukihiro, who was the commander of the Military Guards of the Left. Having heard that he had some fine sake, some courtiers went to visit him, and Yukihiro held a party for them that very day. Fujiwara no Masachika, Middle Controller of the Left, who had been serving in the Privy Chamber, was the guest of honour. The host was a man of refined sensibility, and he arranged some flowers in a vase, including an extraordinary wisteria spray some three and a half feet long. Everyone composed poems about the wisteria. They were almost finished when the host's younger brother arrived, having heard that there was a party taking place. The guests caught hold of him, demanding that he, too, compose a poem. As he knew little about poetry, he demurred, but they compelled him to anyway. His poem:

So many take shelter
beneath the wisteria blossom,
symbol of the Fujiwara clan.
Its bountiful shade
reaches further than ever.

'Why compose a poem such as *this*?' they asked. He answered, 'I was thinking of how the chancellor has reached such heights these days and how his entire clan prospers.' No one could criticize the poem further.

Riding Upon Clouds

Long ago, there lived a man who was not much of a poet but understood well the subtleties of the human heart. He did, however, send one poem to a high-ranking lady when she became a nun, because she was his relative. She had gone to live at a faraway mountain retreat in order to escape the society of the capital because her dislike of human affairs was so intense. His poem:

One cannot hope
to ride upon clouds
just by renouncing the world,
but perhaps one can be free
of the troubles of life.

The lady in question was the princess who had served as the Priestess of Ise.

A Fleeting Dream

Long ago, there was a man of utter sincerity in the service of the Fukakusa Emperor who was highly conscientious and had little interest in matters of love. Perhaps it was a mistake of the heart, but he became intimate with a lady who was favoured by a son of the emperor. He sent her a poem.

Our night together
was like a fleeting dream,
but when I dozed off
it appeared to me again,
even fainter still.

A disappointing poem, indeed!

‘See-Weed’ and Winks, Not Winkles

Long ago, without strong conviction, a certain lady became a nun. Though she adopted a nun’s garb, she must have retained some interest in the affairs of the world, for one day she went out to see the Kamo festival. The man was there, and he composed a poem and had it delivered to her.

Dear Fisher Nun,
disliking the sad sea of life,
you took up these habits,
but, even so, give me a wink
and a nibble of ‘see-weed’.

It is said that the lady was the former Priestess of Ise and that when the poem was delivered to her carriage, she gave up viewing the festival and returned home.

Mister Dewdrop

Long ago, the man sent a message to a lady: 'If things go on like this, it will be the death of me.' The lady's answer:

Mister Dewdrop,
if you must vanish, then do!
But even should you not,
no one will try to thread like pearls
your life-drops of dew.

The man thought that she was extremely rude, but he fell even more in love with her than ever.

Dyeing Itself Red

Long ago, while accompanying some princes on an excursion, the man composed a poem beside the bank of the Tatsuta River.

Unheard of, even in the age
of the raging gods—
the Tatsuta River
dyeing its own waters
autumnal reds.



The Tatsuta River

The Truth-Revealing Rain

Long ago, a man of high rank had a maid in his household who was proposed to by an imperial secretary named Fujiwara no Toshiyuki. The girl was still very young and unable to write letters or express her feelings well, much less compose poetry. So the master of the house drafted a letter for her and had her copy it and send it to Toshiyuki. Quite dazzled by it, Toshiyuki composed a poem in reply.

While the rain pours down
I am lost in thought,
but it is a river of tears
that drenches my sleeves,
for there is no way for us to meet.

As before, the master of the house wrote a reply for her:

The river of tears must be shallow,
if only your sleeves get wet.
When I hear you have been swept away
by floods of tears,
I may believe in your love.

Toshiyuki was so taken with this response that it is said he rolled up the poem and placed it in his letter casket, where he still treasures it.

Later, after Toshiyuki had succeeded in winning the girl, he sent her another letter: 'It seems it may rain at any moment, so I am wondering whether or not I should go to visit you now. If I am lucky, it won't.'
Again the master of the house replied in the girl's place with a poem:



The Truth-Revealing Rain

I could never ask
if your love is true,
but the rain that knows
falls more and more heavily
and will reveal the truth.

Receiving the poem, Toshiyuki rushed to her in a state of great agitation without troubling to put on a hat or cape and arrived soaking wet.

Crying Frogs

Long ago, a lady who bore a grudge against a man repeated a poem over and over again:

Because the wind always blows,
the waves keep rising
and covering the rocks,
just like my sleeves
that never dry of tears.

The man who heard it, thinking that she was blaming him, replied:

Though not a drop of rain falls,
water rises in the rice fields
where night after night
so many frogs are crying—
all because of you.

First Mourned

Long ago, the man sent a poem to a friend who had lost a loved one.

Which did you think
you would have to mourn first—
cherry blossoms or the one
whose life was even shorter
than the petals’?

Bind Me with a Spell

Long ago, the man received a message from a lady whom he had been visiting in secret: 'Tonight, you appeared in my dream.' The man's reply:

My spirit must have left me
in its desire to be with you.
Later in the night,
if you see it again,
please bind it down with a spell.

Coming Undone

Long ago, under the pretence of offering condolences for someone who had passed away, the man sent a poem to a high-ranking lady.

I do not know if such things
happened in the distant past,
but just now I understand
that one can love someone
whom one has not yet met.

The lady's reply:

I doubt that you love me
as you say you do,
for I see no sign
of my undersash coming undone
as proof that you may love me.

The man's response:

I will not say
'I love you' again,
but if your undersash
comes undone by itself,
you will know it is because of me.

Drifting Smoke

Long ago, the man was deeply in love with a lady and they pledged themselves to each other. But then the lady fell for another man. The former lover's poem:

Blown by rough winds,
smoke from the salt-making fires
of the fisherfolk of Suma
has drifted in a direction
I could never have imagined.

The Shortest Time

Long ago, the man found himself once more alone. His poem:

Life itself
is not long at all;
how could you
have forgotten me
in an even shorter time?

The Crane's Lament

Long ago, bringing the man in his party to handle the hawks, Emperor Koko went on an imperial outing to Serikawa. The man thought that he was too old for such a task, but he was taken along because he had formerly served in that role. On the patterned sleeves of his hunting robes, he inscribed a poem:

Do not reproach
this old man in hunting robes.
Just as the crane laments,
'This day will be my end,'
I wear these robes for the last time.

The poem put the emperor in a bad mood. The man had written it thinking of his own advanced years, but the emperor, who was no longer young, took it to be about himself.

Burned by Live Coals

Long ago, the man was living with a lady in the province of Michinoku, when suddenly the man said to her, 'I've decided to go to live in the capital.' The lady was distraught, but she arranged a farewell for him, serving him sake at a place called Miyakoshima in Oki-no-ite. She recited a poem.

Being burned by live coals
would not be as painful
as our parting, for I must stay
at the Island of the Capital
far from the one where you will go.

Eaves on Waves

Long ago, the man wandered aimlessly until he reached the province of Michinoku. There he sent a poem to someone he loved back in the capital:

On the waves, the eaves
of a hut on a tiny island shore.
How long since I have seen you—
on the waves, the eaves
on a tiny island shore.

He added, 'Things are getting better now.'

The Shrine of the Little Pine

Long ago, the emperor made a progress to the Sumiyoshi Shrine. A poem on the occasion:

Dear Little Pine,
on the bay of Sumiyoshi,
since I saw you first,
how many eons
have passed?

Then the deity of the shrine appeared and declared:

You may not know it,
but you are dear to me—
since ancient times at this shrine
on the white-waved shore,
you have been blessed by me.

Creeping Vine

Long ago, the man wrote to a lady with whom he had not been in touch for a long time: 'I have no intention of forgetting you. I am actually about to visit you.' Her answer:

Creeping Vine,
as you crawl up
so very many trees,
I am not in the least bit pleased
you claim to love me still.

Keepsake Enemies

Long ago, upon catching sight of some keepsakes that had been left to her by an unfaithful man, a lady composed a poem.

These keepsakes
are now my enemies,
for if they were not here,
there might be times
I could forget that man.

Festival of Pots

Long ago, the man thought that a lady he favoured was inexperienced in the ways of love, only to discover that she had become secretly involved with a person of high rank. After some time had passed, he sent her a poem.

At Tsukuma in Omi,
let the festival begin.
As you were so cruel to me,
I will count the pots on your head
to number the men you have had.

Plum-Blossom Bonnet

Long ago, upon noticing that someone emerging from the Plum Pavilion was getting wet in the rain, the man composed a poem.

Dear Drenched One,
let me help you
return safely home
with a plum-blossom bonnet
such as the warblers sew.

The reply:

I need no plum-blossom bonnet
that warblers are said to sew.
Give me instead
the flame of your desire
to dry my robes, love you in return.

Waters of Promise

Long ago, the man sent a poem to a lady who had broken her vow to marry him:

Trusting in your love,
I scooped and drank
from Yamashiro's Ide spring,
but its clear-water promise
slipped right through my hands.

No reply came from the lady.

Becoming a Quail

Long ago, the man must have grown tired of a lady living at a place called Fukakusa (Grasses Deep), because he sent her this poem:

If I leave this village
where we have been together
for all these years,
without my visits it will become
a plain of deep grasses.

The lady's reply:

If it becomes a wild plain,
I will become a plaintive quail
and cry in sorrow;
then won't you come sometimes,
if only to hunt?

The man was so moved by the poem that he lost all desire to leave her.

Not a Soul ...

Long ago, the man composed a poem, though it is not exactly clear what the cause of his suffering was.

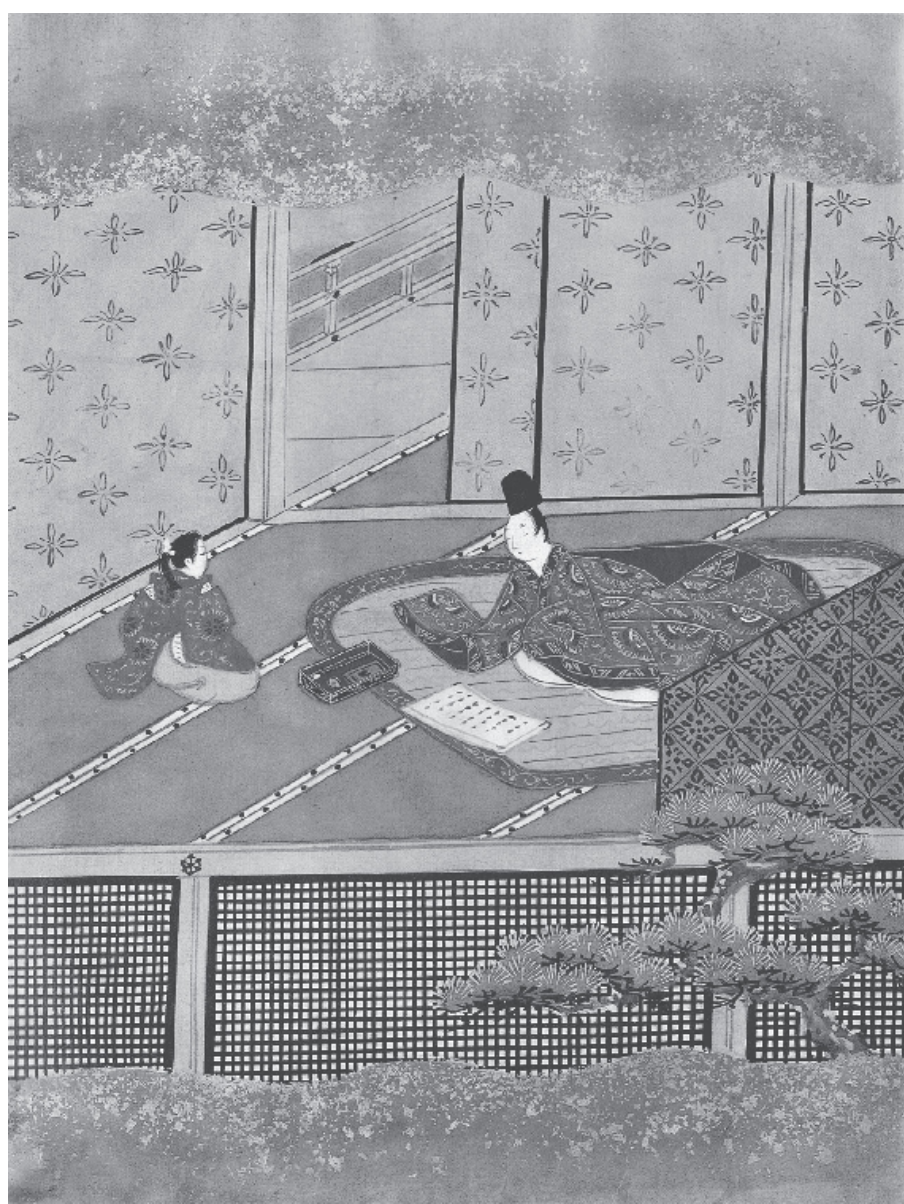
My heart is full,
but I will keep it all unsaid
for there is no one
to share my thoughts with,
not a soul like me.

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This Day

Long ago, the man became ill and sensed that his death was approaching.

I knew I'd have to walk on the path
we all must finally take,
but I had no idea
it would be tomorrow,
much less today.



Much Less Today ...

Commentary

A Note on the Commentary

This commentary is indebted to material prepared especially for this book by Tokuro Yamamoto, one of the world's foremost authorities on the *Tales*; it also relies on the commentaries of another great authority, Yoichi Katagiri, especially his latest one, *Ise monogatari zendokkai*, Teisuke Fukui's notes in the Shōgakukan edition of the *Tales*, and, to a lesser extent, the commentaries of Minoru Watanabe, Joji Ishida, Toshiko Abe and others.

I also refer to Masao Takeoka, who wrote an important and absorbing commentary on the *Tales* – *Ise monogatari zenhyōshaku* – which, although it has mostly been rejected by the Japanese academic community, is full of stimulating, if sometimes quirky, comments. His exegesis on the hidden erotic language and imagery in the work is also interesting. For this and other quoted material listed below, see also [Further Reading](#).

- Abe, Toshiko, *Ise monogatari zenchūyaku* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1979)
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Taketori monogatari, Ise monogatari, Yamato monogatari, Heichū monogatari, Shinpen nihon koten bungaku zenshū, vol. 12 (Tokyo: Shōgakukan, 1994)
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Watanabe, Minoru, *Ise monogatari*, Shinchō nihon koten shūsei, 2nd series (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1976)
Yamamoto, Tokuro, *Ise monogatari-ron: Buntai, shudai, kyōju* (Tokyo: Kasama Shoin, 2001)

In the commentary, words and phrases highlighted in bold constitute a cross-reference to an entry in either '[Appendix 1: Glossary of Literary](#)

and Social Conventions’ or ‘Appendix 2: Historical Characters’, both of which may be consulted for further information.

1

Coming of Age

The extraordinary first episode of the *Tales* contains many key elements central to the development of Heian-period romantic tales and the flowering of the Heian aesthetic. Among these was the establishment of the spontaneous composition and exchange of poems as being among the most important elements in the pursuit of love. This became the defining characteristic of Heian courtly love, and such exchanges form the structural and poetic core of the *Tales*. (See the Introduction, [here](#), for more on this.) The episode also establishes the fictional, historically distant setting of the *Tales*, beginning, as do all the subsequent episodes except for [Episode 17](#), with the words ‘long ago’ (*mukashi* – see [here](#)). Other key elements include the chance meeting between the hero and two beautiful ladies in an unusual setting. The implication that the sisters are beautiful but living in disadvantaged circumstances would have also struck a chord in the Heian lover’s heart, and the pursuit of the vulnerable lady was an important motif in Heian literature.

A similar scene appears in the Chinese work *Yuxian ku* (The Den of Wandering Immortals; *Yūsenkutsu* in Japanese) by Zhang Wencheng (658?–730), brought to Japan in the Nara period (710–94) and thought to have deeply influenced the *Tales*, as well as other Japanese works such as the [Man’yōshū](#) and [The Tale of Genji](#). Its influence can be seen in this episode in which the hero chances to see two beautiful sisters alone in a remote house. Beautiful women often appear in pairs: in *Yuxian ku*, there are two heavenly angels, and in some versions of the famous folk tale ‘The Tale of Urashima Taro’ there are not one but two lovely ladies who captivate the hero during his visit to a palace under the sea.

Many works of Chinese literature aside from *Yuxian ku* greatly influenced the *Tales of Ise*, including, first and foremost, the poetry of Bai Juyi (see [here](#)), but also *chuanqi* (strange tales) from the Tang period (618–907) and the mid-Tang *Yingying zhuan* (Story of Yingying) by Yuan Zhen (779–831).

The means of encounter, catching a glimpse of the lady ([kaimami](#)), is an important trope in the Heian world of love. Finally, the episode offers an excellent early example of the technique of basing a poem on a famous poem from the past (see below). The examples found in the *Tales* are exceptions, as this technique of composing poems was not widely employed until the late Heian period, when the influential poet

and critic Fujiwara no Shunzei (see [here](#)) was active. From then on, it developed into an important rhetorical feature of poetry known as ‘allusive variation’ (*honkadōri*). The purpose of borrowing from famous poems was to expand the meaning of the original or to recreate another poem based on it.

On impulse, the hero dashes off a poem written on a piece of material torn from the hem of his hunting robe, in which he asserts that his feelings are in as much disarray as the irregular pattern of ferns rubbed into the hem. There are various interpretations about what this pattern is, but most modern readers take it to be related to the technique of impressing (*zuri*; literally, ‘rubbing’) a pattern on to fabric using the sap of the hare’s foot fern (*shinobūgusa*). A great rock where such fabric was dyed can still be seen today near Fukushima city and was described by Bashō (1644–94) in his *Oku no hosomichi* (Narrow Road to the North). *Shinobu*, as well as being the name of an area in north-eastern Japan (see also ‘Michinoku’ below), also means ‘to love secretly’, hence various meanings and associations are compressed into a single word.

The rapidity with which the hero responds, the spontaneous tearing off of part of his hem, the ability to compose a brilliant poem on the spot based on a great poem from the past, and his dedication to the way of love establish the hero’s credentials as an ideal lover and a man of refinement. The expression *miyabi* (refined elegance) makes its sole appearance in this episode of the *Tales*, but it is a crucial concept in our understanding of the psychology of the protagonist (see [here](#)).

Episode 1 also introduces another important device – that of concluding episodes with ironic and occasionally humorous comments by the narrator. Here, there are three. The first, ‘This whole affair must have delighted him’, is speculation by the narrator. The second, ‘it was surely inspired by this one’, introduces an earlier poem by the ninth-century poet and statesman Minamoto no **Tōru**. A renowned aesthete, he was the owner of a villa at Uji (the site upon which the famous Byōdōin Temple was built; see [Map 3](#)) and another splendid residence, the Kawara mansion (see [Map 3](#)), which is the focal point of **Episode 81**. He is featured in two **Noh** plays, *Tōru* (based on **Episode 81**) and *Nishikigi*, the latter also citing this poem. The poem is also quoted in the Noh play *Oshio* – about the hero, Narihira – which is chiefly based on **Episode 76**, but also quotes poems from **Episodes 1, 4, 12** and **17**. It was additionally included in two of the most celebrated anthologies, the *Kokinshū* (no. 724) and *Hyakunin isshu* (no. 14).

The narrator’s third and final comment is a wry note: ‘The elegant behaviour of men in those days could be quite impulsive.’ Beneath the playful criticism, it is clear that he is really praising the hero; such

humorous self-deprecation is an integral component of the Japanese psyche even today.

[Episode 1](#) shares many features with [Episode 41](#), which are discussed in the commentary to the latter.

a young man who had just come of age: A high-ranking boy's coming-of-age ceremony, based on a Confucian ritual, occurred between the ages of twelve and fifteen. The front of the boy's head was shaved, and the hair at the back was tied in a topknot. The boy donned a pointed black hat with a tail, and put on adult robes, which was the formal court attire. He also took an adult name and, in many cases, received both his ranking as a nobleman and his official post at the same time.

went hawking: Hunting was popular in Japan, especially among the upper classes, until the end of the Edo period (1603–1868). Birds such as cranes and pheasants as well as rabbits and other small animals were hunted, using hawks and dogs.

Kasuga near the former capital of Nara: A location east of Nara (then Heijokyo – see [Map 2](#)), the imperial capital for much of the eighth century. In 784, Emperor Kanmu (r. 781–806) moved the capital from Heijokyo to Nagaoka and then, ten years later, to Heiankyo (present-day Kyoto – see [Maps 2](#) and [3](#)).

Lavender shoots: The 'lavender shoots' (*wakamurasaki*) in the first poem refer more to the two sisters than to the plant *murasaki* (*Lithospermum erythrorhizon* or purple gromwell). The colour *murasaki* is actually more purple than lavender, but I felt that 'lavender' sounded more poetic in context. Purple has long been a colour of the noble classes, associated with dignity and refinement. As for the actual shoots, they are neither lavender nor purple. The plant, which used to grow wild in mountains and on moors, has long green leaves and produces small white flowers in June and July, while its roots were used from ancient times as a source of purple dye.

Michinoku: Michinoku – the old name for the eastern part of present-day Tohoku in the north-eastern part of Honshu – means 'travelling far along the road', indicating somewhere remote and far away.

Although this and almost all the episodes in the *Tales* are supposed to depict the adventures of **Narihira**, this episode is set immediately after the capital moved to Heiankyo (now Kyoto – see [Maps 2](#) and [3](#) and commentary to [Episode 1](#)), when in fact the historical Ariwara no

Narihira was born in 825, several decades later. This deliberate anachronism – perhaps the narrator having fun with the reader (see below) – indicates that the tale was meant to be read as fiction, and the hero viewed more as a fictional than a historical figure. Such obvious fictionalization is one of the chief interests of this episode.

This episode introduces the concept of *irogonomi* (being fond of affairs), which is central to the *Tales* (see [here](#)). In this instance, the hero sends a poem to an impoverished lady, telling her of his unhappy feelings. The phrase ‘It seemed that she was not alone’ has been interpreted in several ways. Fukui argues that it means she was not single and that another man was visiting her. Katagiri maintains that it means she had more than one lover who was visiting her.

Custom demanded that courtiers send a ‘morning-after’ poem (*kinuginu no uta*) to the beloved after a night spent in each other’s company, but only if the relationship had been consummated. Although the poem in question is a ‘morning-after’ poem, it is unclear whether the man and woman have made love, and this has been the subject of much debate. In the original Japanese text, the couple are described as engaged in conversation (*uchi-monogatara*, which has the same meaning as [monogatara](#), another form of the verb that appears in the *Tales*), an expression that can imply pillow talk after lovemaking, but by itself it does not indicate whether they had sex. Some commentators argue that it is difficult to imagine the couple having spent the whole night just talking and that the morning-after poem suggests they must have had sex.

Yamamoto, however, maintains that the poem seems to indicate that the hero spent the night in an unsatisfactory way, engaged in conversation but without making love. The fact that the same poem also appears in the *Kokinshū* (no. 616), with the headnote ‘Composed in the midst of a light rain and sent to a lady after spending time conversing with her secretly on the first night of the third month’, would seem to support this view.

The poems in the *Kokinshū* are carefully arranged, with poems on the early stages of a romance preceding those about its dissolution. The poem in question appears at the very beginning of the first book on love (an indication also of the high regard in which the editors held the poem), at the stage when an actual physical relationship has yet to develop and hence suggesting that *monogatara* in this context is simple conversation and not pillow talk after making love. Ambiguity is an inherent feature of the *Tales*, however, and as with the apparent fictionalization of the time period, there is no definitive interpretation here; the reader should feel free to read it as one or the other or even enjoy the possibility of both.

Given the did-they-didn’t-they uncertainty, the answer to the

question posed by the narrator, ‘What could his feelings have been?’, becomes more debatable. Is the narrator wondering why the hero has sent a ‘morning-after’ poem if there had been no physical relations? Or is he being deliberately ironic, knowing full well how the hero would be feeling after a night of love? Such playfully tongue-in-cheek commentary is typical of the *Tales*.

western part of the city: Suzaku Avenue, which ran through the middle of the capital (Heiankyo/Kyoto – see [Maps 2](#) and [3](#)), divided the city into east and west, districts that were known, respectively, as the ‘left’ and ‘right’ sides of the capital as viewed from the south-facing imperial palace. (This division was related to the *ritsuryo* code – see [Left and Right](#).) The lady lives west of Suzaku Avenue, hence on the right side. Geomantic considerations of the day regarded the right as inferior to the left. The west side of the capital was swampy, and it never flourished, so few people of wealth and status lived there. The fact that the lady lives in such a place suggests that she was impoverished.

earnest man: The expression *mame otoko*, translated here as ‘earnest man’, gives the opposite impression to the image of the playboy usually implied by *irogonomi*, and this has invited various interpretations, early commentators suggesting that, as the work is supposed to be by Narihira himself, he was merely using the occasion to praise himself.

3

A Gift of Seaweed

[Episode 3](#) provides a good illustration of the way in which poetry up to the early Heian period often sought to convey feelings of love with a childlike frankness. The hero sends a poem to a lady who would later become the **Empress of the Second Avenue**. A number of episodes in the *Tales* suggest that **Narihira** was romantically involved with her, although there is no historical evidence to support this.

With the poem, the hero encloses a gift of ‘edible seaweed’. This is *hijiki*, eaten in Japan to this day but regarded at the time as a delicacy in the capital (Heiankyo/Kyoto – see [Maps 2](#) and [3](#)) as the city was distant from the sea. In the poem, the word for seaweed (*hijikimo*) puns on the word for ‘mattress’ or ‘bedding’, but appearing in a hyphenated form (*hijiki-mono*), making it a little difficult to detect. Just as the word for seaweed is hidden in the original Japanese, I have hidden it in the translation, highlighting the letters in bold (see also [mono no na no uta](#)).

In sending a gift of seaweed with the poem, the hero is wittily

reinforcing his invitation to his beloved to spread out their robes to make a bed. The hidden word gives the poem a delightful charm. It was common at the time to enclose a gift with a poem, especially one that enhanced the message of the poem.

This episode ends with a comment on the empress that is very obviously not part of the main narrative, although it is unclear whether it appeared as a footnote from the outset or whether it was added at a later stage during the long formative process of the *Tales* (see [here](#)).

If your love is true: The first line of the poem in the Japanese has been variously interpreted as ‘If there is such a thing as love’ or ‘If we love each other’. The poem is similar in theme to several poems in the *Man’yōshū* that feature a hut covered in reeds, such as the following (no. 2825):

What good is a house
strewn with pearls to me?
Let it be a hut covered in weeds
if I can be there
with my love.

(*Tama shikeru / ie mo nani semu / yaemugura / oeru oya mo / imo to oriteba*)

4

The Spring of Old

Episode 4 is famous for its ambiguous poem that has given rise to a plethora of differing interpretations. The episode, thought to be one of the original ones composed by **Narihira** himself (see [here](#)), depicts the hero devastated by the disappearance of a high-ranking lady with whom he had fallen in love. The most common explanation for her disappearance is that she became a consort of the emperor and thus inaccessible (in ‘a place where ordinary people could not go’). Visiting her former apartments and finding them in a dilapidated state with gaps in the floorboards, the hero writes of his desperation.

Enigmatic and apparently incomplete, the poem has always been considered difficult, but its depth of feeling has never been questioned, and part of this depth is due to the ambiguity of its inarticulacy. Some have interpreted the opening lines as rhetorical questions and others as direct interrogatives. If one takes the former view, it means that the moon and spring are, of course, the same, and the lines would thus read: ‘Is the moon not the same? / Is the spring not the spring of old?’ But in the latter view, an opposite meaning emerges: the moon and spring appear to be totally different from the previous year.

Katagiri, considered one of the greatest living authorities on the

Tales, asserts that the poem is quite straightforward and simply means that the poet feels that everything has changed because his beloved is no longer there. Translated literally, the poem does not really add up to a complete statement, so in my rendering I originally sacrificed inarticulacy to intelligibility and added two lines, indicated by the italics: ‘Could that be the same moon? / Could this be the spring of old? / Only I am as I’ve always been, / *but without you here / nothing seems the same.*’ In revising the translation, however, I came to the conclusion that Narihira’s ‘inarticulacy’ is an essential component of his poetic nature and craft, and so I omitted the last line, leaving it up to the reader to complete it.

This poem has long been admired by the Japanese for the way in which it allows for multiple interpretations. Ki no Tsurayuki, compiler of the *Kokinshū* (see [here](#)), writes in the preface to that anthology that Narihira’s poetry has ‘too much emotion and too few words’ and this statement is often interpreted in a negative way, with this poem in particular providing a good example of the shortcomings of Narihira’s verse. However, such a reading is supported by neither the text nor the Japanese commentaries. The poem is actually quite simple and does not employ any sophisticated rhetorical devices or conceits. In fact, if it is representative, it is because it is such a fine example of the admirable economy of Narihira’s style, in being able to convey so much emotion in so few words.

The poem is also found in the *Kokinshū* (no. 747) with an unusually long headnote for that collection, and Narihira is named as the author. An early version of the *Tales*, presumed to have been written by Narihira himself, may have been the source for the *Kokinshū* headnote, which closely resembles the prose narrative of the *Tales*.

Her Majesty the Empress Mother: The identity of the Empress Mother is not known, but the location (see below) suggests that it was the **Empress of the Fifth Avenue**. The name of the lady with whom the man falls in love is not specified, although later, perhaps under the influence of [Episode 3](#), it came to be read as a tragic tale concerning the Empress Mother’s niece, the **Empress of the Second Avenue**.

the eastern side of the Fifth Avenue: This is in a section of the capital (Heiankyo/Kyoto – see [Maps 2](#) and [3](#)) to the east of Suzaku Avenue, the north–south axis dividing the city (see the commentary to [Episode 2](#)). Large avenues crossed the city from east to west, starting with the First Avenue in the north and ending with the Ninth Avenue in the south.

around the tenth day of the New Year: See [lunisolar calendar](#).

Bursting into tears: See [otoko naki \(crying of men\)](#).

Nod Off to Sleep

Episode 5 closely resembles a tale in the fifth-century Chinese work *Shishuo xinyu* (A New Account of Tales of the World), by Liu Yiqing, and is thought to be based on it, providing a good example of the profound influence of Chinese literature on the *Tales*. The episode is also interesting in the way in which it exemplifies the Heian belief that an entreaty to the gods might elicit a response (see **kotohogu**). Other stories illustrating this belief (known as *katoku setsuwa*) can be found even earlier in Japanese literature, in the *Nihon shoki* (Chronicle of Japan; 720).

Like the poem in **Episode 4** – to which this episode is believed to be closely related – the poem here is included in the **Kokinshū** (no. 632) with an almost identically worded headnote. It is thought that the *Kokinshū* editors took both poem and prose from the *Tales*, which was already in existence at that time (see **here**). As with **Episode 3** – whose poem is similar in sentiment – it has been suggested that the narrator's final comment may have been an interpolation in later centuries, after the completion of the *Tales*, but now it is thought that it was added at some point during the long formative process of the work.

a lady who lived on the eastern side of the Fifth Avenue: As in **Episode 4**, the identity of the lady is presumed, from the location, to be the **Empress of the Second Avenue**, as confirmed by the narrator's final comment.

the head of the house: The name and gender of the head of the house are not specified, but, as in **Episode 4**, the setting suggests that it was the **Empress of the Fifth Avenue**.

Empress of the Second Avenue: See Appendix 2 (**here**).

her brothers: Referring to **Mototsune** and **Kunitsune** – see Appendix 2 (**here**).

Pearls of Dew

Episode 6, depicting an elopement, is one of the most celebrated episodes in the *Tales*. The famous **Noh** play *Unrinin* (The Hall in Cloud Forest) is based on it. The ending, with its apparently factual interpretation of the opening narrative, is in marked contrast to the fairy-tale account of a lady being eaten by a demon. This is the only episode in the *Tales* where such generic fusion occurs, and the literary experimentation has tantalized readers for centuries. The reference in the final part to real historical figures – the **Empress of the Second**

Avenue, Mototsune and Kunitsune – has also been the subject of debate. These figures did exist, and although the original readers may have regarded the episode as fiction, they would also have believed it to be inspired by a real incident. Today, the events described in the portion of text after the poems are thought to be entirely fictional.

Yamamoto offers the most persuasive theory as to why the *Tales* splices together two such differing narratives. He claims that the episode mirrors the style of the *Shijing* (Classic of Poetry; *Shikyō* in Japanese), the earliest collection of Chinese poetry – some poems dating back to 1046 BC – which was widely studied in the Heian period. The poems in the *Shijing* are often followed by Confucian commentary, so the addition of a factual commentary to the clearly fictional part of the tale in this episode may be seen as borrowing from that text. According to Yamamoto, given the clearly fantastical nature of the first part of the episode, the factual commentary was necessary in order to maintain the fiction that the hero of the work was the historical **Narihira**. The concluding section is unusually long, and as with [Episodes 3](#) and [5](#), it was previously thought that this note was added much later. More recent commentators, however, maintain that it was actually penned at the original time of writing to explain the uncharacteristic behaviour of the hero, as it would have been almost inconceivable for a person of such high rank to run off with a lady to a remote location.

Another curious feature of this episode is the lady's apparent inability to recognize dew. Perhaps this was simply a device to indicate her high rank: it suggests that she has been brought up indoors with the greatest care and has therefore never seen dew before. Alternatively, the lady's question, 'What are those?', could have been included merely to provide a context for the poem, in which the hero, seeing the dewdrops (*tsuyu*), recalls her question and laments that it would have been better if he had passed away as quickly as dewdrops do. Over time, more and more fanciful interpretations of the episode were suggested, including the suggestion – based on the Buddhist view of the *Tales* as illustrating sex as the path to enlightenment – that the 'dewdrop' that the lady saw was in fact a drop of semen following intercourse, a theory that was eventually discredited by the great Muromachi-period scholar and aristocrat Ichijo Kanera (1402–81).

One reason for the great popularity of this episode – rivalled only by that of [Episodes 9, 23](#) and [69](#) – is that it is one of the original models for tales of forbidden love and elopement. The scene of Narihira as folkloric hero eloping with a lady on his back became an iconic image of the *Tales* itself. This episode also contributed to the establishment of Narihira's reputation as the prototypical lover of the

classical period. The fusion of a folk tale with fiction ostensibly based on a historical event created an intriguing indeterminacy which has appealed to the imagination of readers of all periods.

stole away with her: The literal meaning of the word used here for ‘stealing away’ (*nusumu*) is ‘stealing’, which in this context can mean either forcible abduction or voluntary elopement. This tale concerns the latter, namely a secret elopement following a prolonged courtship. For another interesting example of a play on this word, see [Episode 10](#).

Akuta River: The Akuta River (see [Maps 2](#) and [3](#)) flows near present-day Takatsuki city in Osaka.

demons: Belief in demons and other supernatural beings was widespread at the time, and men went about armed, always prepared to meet an enemy. Malign demons were believed to live under cover in deserted dwellings, out of sight of human beings and ready to cause harm to the unwitting traveller.

rubbing his feet together: Bewailing the loss of the lady, the hero ‘rubs his feet together’ (*ashizuri*). It seems to have been a convention at the time for those stricken with grief to lay on their back and rub their feet together, but the exact meaning of the expression is not known.

a consort of the emperor: A reference to the **Somedono Empress**.

7

The Returning Waves

[Episodes 7–15](#) depict the hero’s journey eastward (marked on [Map 1](#)). No clear reason is given for his exile, but the ill-fated affair with Takaiko, the **Empress of the Second Avenue**, described in [Episodes 3–6](#), are seen as the most likely reason for the hero’s departure from the capital.

The journey to the east (*azuma-kudari*), literally ‘descending to the east’, is based on the motif, common in Japanese mythology and classical literature, of the exile of a young nobleman from court (*kishu ryūritan* – see [here](#)). Here the hero travels from the capital, the cultural and political centre, into the lands of the east, a newly developing area in Japan, far from the long-established lands of the west. It is not known whether the historical figure Ariwara no **Narihira** ever went to the eastern provinces, but the details of the tale are unrealistic. It is also unlikely that a nobleman of the period would have undertaken such an ill-advised and potentially dangerous journey, indicating that the episode must be fictional.

In the poem included in this episode, the hero expresses his desire

to return to the capital, just as the waves of the bay seen from the shore appear to be returning home. The poet's envy of the waves is expressed through the use of the verb *kaeru*, which in the poem means both 'ebbing' and 'returning home'. Unlike the poet, the waves can go back to where they came from. The line 'from whence I have come' (*sugiyuku kata*) suggests both a place travelled from and a time in the past.

The same poem appears in the *Gosenshū* (no. 1352), where it is attributed to Narihira, but the headnote merely says that it was written during a journey to the east and does not specify exactly where. According to the headnote, moreover, Narihira wrote the poem as he crossed a river, not when he was on the border of two provinces, so the 'waves' in his poem are those of a river, not the sea.

Episodes 7 and 8 – similar to **Episode 9**, the main tale in Narihira's 'journey to the east' – were long thought to have been the first of the series of stories to be composed about the hero's journey. Today, however, they are thought to have been composed later, under the influence of **Episode 9**, and inserted into the text with no regard to the sequence of events.

Ise and Owari provinces: Ise (see **Map 2**) is part of the present-day Mie Prefecture, and Owari is in Aichi Prefecture.

8

Mount Asama's Peak

Friendship is an important motif in **Episodes 8–16**, established by the willingness of the hero's companions to accompany him on his difficult journey from the capital. **Episodes 11 and 16** are particularly striking examples of this theme. The Chinese poet Bai Juyi, hugely popular among Japanese aristocrats of the Heian period, often wrote about male friendship (see [here](#)), and his influence is usually cited as one of the main reasons for the prominence of the theme in the *Tales*.

Recent scholarship suggests that **Episodes 7 and 8** were composed at a later date under the influence of **Episode 9** and subsequently inserted into the text with no relation to the sequence of events. One cannot expect perfect continuity between the various episodes, since most of them were composed independently and compiled later.

set off towards the east: See the commentary to **Episode 7**.

Mount Asama in the province of Shinano: Shinano is the present-day Nagano Prefecture; Mount Asama (see **Map 1**) is an active volcano on the border between Nagano and Gunma prefectures. The 'smoke' from Mount Asama could not be seen from the Tokaido (Eastern Sea

Road), along which the hero is supposed to have travelled, and this has long troubled commentators, but the significance of this has been exaggerated. Travel was very restricted at that time, and it would have been highly unlikely for the authors of these tales to have travelled the terrain described, so such mistakes in geography are quite natural. As the only two known active volcanoes at that time, Mount Fuji and Mount Asama were often employed in love poetry to express burning passion (see [omoi or omohi](#)).

9

Departing for the East

[Episode 9](#) is one of the most famous and splendid of all the *Tales* on account of the tour de force acrostic poem on the irises (*kakitsubata*) at Yatsushashi (Eight Bridges – see [Map 1](#)) and the exquisite final poem. The eight bridges of the Yatsushashi poem were traditionally depicted in period illustrations as zigzagging wooden bridges surrounded by irises, and this image captured the Japanese imagination. It has been portrayed in Japanese art so frequently that it has become the quintessential visual icon of the *Tales*. Particularly well known are two pairs of screens painted by the artist Ogata Korin (1658–1716): *Yatsushashi* (in the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York); and *Kakitsubata* (in the collection of the Nezu Museum, Tokyo). The scene also inspired Komparu Zenchiku's **Noh** play *Kakitsubata*, which influenced James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (see [here](#)).

The longest episode in the *Tales*, [Episode 9](#) also contains the most significant accounts of the journey to the east (see the commentary to [Episode 7](#)). It is made up of four scenes at four locations along the hero's journey – Yatsushashi, Mount Utsu, Mount Fuji and the Sumida River – each scene being built around a poem. As in [Episodes 7](#) and [8](#), the scenes are believed to be largely fictional. The first and the fourth poems are included in the *Kokinshū* (nos. 410 and 411) with long headnotes very similar to the text of the *Tales*, which suggests that both poems and prose episodes (at Yatsushashi and the Sumida River) existed before the *Kokinshū*. The scenes at Mount Utsu and Mount Fuji (see [Map 1](#)) were probably added at some later time during the long period of expansion and revision of the *Tales* (see [here](#)).

As in [Episode 8](#), the hero sets off from the capital with a few close friends. Their first stop is at an area of marshland known as Yatsushashi, where water from the local river divides into numerous channels, like the legs of a spider, each of which is crossed by a bridge. Here, 'eight', for the Eight Bridges (Yatsushashi) simply means a large number. The irises mentioned bloom in the fifth month of the

lunisolar calendar (June–July), suggesting that the journey takes place in midsummer.

The accompanying poem is a lament about the hero's longing for his beloved, whom he has left behind in the capital. The poems in the *Tales* make use of a whole range of poetic devices, but this one stands out on account of its acrostic or hidden word (***mono no na no uta***) in which each line starts with a syllable (*ka-ki-tsu-ba-ta*) that spells out 'iris'. The poem includes other devices too, often overlapping each other. *Kara-goromo* (fine robes), forming a pillow word (***makura kotoba***) with 'to wear' (*kiru*), has been translated as 'In these familiar lovely robes'. *Kara-goromo* originally meant 'Chinese-style robes' but here refers to beautiful and elegant clothing in general. There are several puns (***kakekotoba***) in this poem: the word *ki* included in *kinuru* means both 'to come' and 'to wear'; the *nare* of *narenishi* means 'beloved' and, when prefixed with *ki* of *kiru* (to wear), gives the sense *kinare* (to become used to from habitual wear); *tsuma* means both 'wife' and 'hem'; and *harūbaru* means 'far away' and 'to full', as in fulling silk. These words also function as **associative words** (***engo***) with 'robes' (*kara-goromo*). The translation also contains much of the wordplay of the original: 'familiar' carries the sense of both 'intimate' and 'habitual'; 'stretching' puns on 'extending into the distance' and fabric that is pulled tight; 'hem' puns on both its literal and abstract meaning (as in 'a journey tinged with ...').

The second poem also uses wordplay based on the location, in this case Mount Utsu. By the mountain, the travellers meet a Buddhist priest travelling around the country to undergo religious training and ask him to carry back a letter to a highborn lady in the capital, whom we understand to be the **Empress of the Second Avenue**. The poem is based on a popular belief found in poetry from the time of the ***Man'yōshū*** (c.770) that seeing a loved one in a dream was proof that that person was thinking of you. By complaining that they can meet neither in the real world nor in dreams, the hero indicates that his beloved is not thinking of him. Here 'Utsu' serves as a homophonically related '**preface**' (***jokotoba***) to 'real world' (*utsutsu*) later in the poem.

In the third poem, on Mount Fuji, the hero playfully reproaches the mountain for not being aware of the seasons because it has snow on it at the hottest time of the year in mid July. Though light-hearted in style, the poem expresses an aesthetic appreciation of seasonal changes that was common in Heian poetry (see [here](#)).

In comparing the size of Mount Fuji and Mount Hie, the narrator notes that the latter is 'here at' (rendered as 'at' in the translation) the capital, emphasizing how the capital is the geographic centre of the tale. Although the hero is supposed to be far away from the capital at Mount Fuji, the narrator inadvertently seems to have forgotten this

and writes ‘here at’ (the capital) instead. Mount Hie (see [Map 2](#)) is north-east of the city, one of the highest mountains visible from it, on the border between the present-day Kyoto and Shiga prefectures.

The narrator also speaks of Mount Fuji as resembling ‘a great mound of salt’ (*shiojiri*). The exact meaning of *shiojiri* has been uncertain since at least the thirteenth century when Fujiwara no Teika (see [here](#)) wrote in his edition of the *Tales* that the meaning was unclear. One theory is that it refers to the mounds of sand used in the production of salt. Seawater was poured over these mounds and left to evaporate in the sun, producing salt crystals. What can be said for certain is that the mounds were conical and that their shape resembled that of Mount Fuji.

The crossing of the Sumida River provides the setting for the last poem in the episode. The crossing makes the travellers feel even more removed from the capital, and the scene is filled with elegiac poignance. The poem is addressed to the Bird of the Capital (*miyakodori*), asking it for news of the beloved in Heiankyo (Kyoto). But it is not a serious entreaty, since the poet well knows that the bird can tell him nothing. *Miyakodori* has been used partly because it contains within it the word for ‘capital’ (*miyako*) and thereby evokes the place itself. Hearing the poem, everyone on the boat weeps in sympathy. If interpreted literally, the last line can be read as asking whether his beloved is alive or dead. It has been interpreted in this way, but it can be more poignantly rendered as ‘is she alive and well?’. Katagiri, Yamamoto and Fukui, editors of the Shōgakukan edition on which this translation is based, all support the interpretation in this translation.

province of Mikawa: The eastern part of the present-day Aichi Prefecture.

dried rice: Dried rice is rice that has been boiled and then dried. It was a form of portable preserved food that could be eaten at any time simply by adding water to it. Here it is the tears of the travellers that provide the necessary liquid, and this improbable idea would have provoked a smile from the original readers.

province of Suruga: The western part of the present-day Shizuoka Prefecture

large river on the border between Musashi and Shimosa: The Sumida River (*Sumidagawa*) runs through Musashi, a region incorporating part of the present-day Kanagawa Prefecture, as well as Saitama Prefecture and the modern-day city of Tokyo. This is the same Sumida River that runs through Tokyo, although today it follows a different course. Shimosa is the ancient name for the area comprising the south-western part of Ibaraki Prefecture and the

northern part of Chiba Prefecture.

Everyone on the boat broke down in tears: See *otoko naki* (crying of men).

10

The Call of the Wild Goose

Many of the scenes in the *Tales* contrast the elegant courtly sophistication of individuals from the capital with the (often amusing) rustic ways of people in the provinces, and this episode is one such example. The man from the capital woos a country girl whose mother is originally from the prestigious Fujiwara clan. The most powerful family in Japan at the time, their name commanded respect and deference even in the provinces. Many members of the court nobility eventually settled in the districts to which they had been sent to govern. But though the mother appears to be from such a family, the husband is of more common stock.

The mother's poem, expressing her support for the hero's suit, seems simple on the surface but is rich in rhetorical features. As well as the metaphor of a wild goose (*kari*), to represent the woman's daughter, the poem employs two puns: *tanomu* ('to rely on' or 'to make a request') puns on *ta no mo* (the surface of the rice field), the latter supplying the sense given in the translation but with the former implied (it is because she relies on the suitor that the daughter runs to him), and *hitaburu ni*, which means both 'eagerly' and 'shaking a clapper'. (*Hita*, meaning 'clapper', is a device for scaring away birds and animals in the rice fields; the noise is made by a bamboo pipe hitting against a wooden board.)

The hero's reply is unusual in that it repeats almost word for word four of the five lines of the woman's poem. While some commentators argue that repeating part of the original poem indicates that he is treating the woman's poem lightly, this was in fact a common feature of such poetic exchanges. Moreover, the woman's poem is very accomplished, believed to reflect her good bloodline and in marked contrast to the 'uncouth' style of the countrywoman's poem in [Episode 14](#).

Commentators also disagree on the meaning of the final phrase – 'he remained true to his ways'. Medieval commentators such as Kanera (see the commentary to [Episode 6](#)) read it as meaning that **Narihira** was a playboy even in the countryside, but modern scholars offer different interpretations. One such scholar is Takeoka, who interprets the last sentence in this episode to mean that even though poems produced in the countryside may be of inferior quality, the elegant convention of displaying courtly love through the exchange of poems

(see [here](#)) was also common there. In other words, not unlike the tongue-in-cheek humour at the end of [Episode 1](#), the narrator's seeming criticism can also be read as veiled praise, asserting that the hero is always true to the way of love.

province of Musashi: See the commentary to [Episode 9](#).

Iruma County: The modern-day city of Iruma in Saitama Prefecture.

11

The Revolving Moon

[Episode 11](#) gives us important insights into the process of composition of the *Tales*. The episode's poem also appears in the *Shūishū* (no. 470), where it has the following headnote: 'Tachibana no Tadamoto was secretly having a relationship with someone's daughter, and, as he was about to leave for a distant place, he sent her this poem.' Thus the original author of the poem is identified not as **Narihira**, but as Tachibana no Tadamoto (d. 955), a man who lived several generations after Narihira. This suggests that the episode was incorporated into the *Tales* no earlier than the second half of the tenth century, making it one of the last episodes to be included, and that the *Tales* therefore reached its present form no earlier than this time.

The poem in this episode was originally a love poem, but it appears here as one of friendship, an important theme in the *Tales* (see [here](#) and [poetic exchanges between men](#)). For the moon as a symbol of the passage of time, see also [Episode 88](#).

journeying in the east: See the commentary to [Episode 7](#).

12

Grasses of the Musashi Plain

The original Japanese of [Episode 12](#) is filled with contradictions and confusing narrative problems: it is not clear when the man is arrested; the conclusion is given at the beginning of the episode; and the storyline is difficult to follow. We are told that the hero fled after hiding the lady in the grass, yet the poem contradicts this: 'My beloved hides here, / and I do, too.' In the translation, this episode has been adapted very slightly for the sake of coherence.

Commentators have long pointed out the entirely unrealistic content of the episode and its somewhat comical elements. Part of the humour arises from the use of the exaggerated 'to steal' instead of the more credible 'to elope'; the translation opts for 'stealing away', which can be read in both ways. As in the tale of abduction in [Episode 6](#), the

elopement was probably voluntary, and it is unlikely that the governor would have been concerned with apprehending runaway lovers. This episode is similar in style to [Episode 9](#) with its depiction of the fanciful idea of using tears to reconstitute rice; the far-fetched notions in both episodes would have seemed amusing to readers at the time.

The poem in this episode also appears as an anonymous poem in the *Kokinshū* (no. 17), where it is set on the Plain of Kasuga (see [Episode 1](#)) instead of the Plain of Musashi (as in [Episodes 9, 10 and 13](#)). In either case, the poem is probably derived from a folk song about lovers meeting secretly on the plain and hoping that the grass would not be burned off on the day of their meeting. (Grass-burning took place every year in early spring to encourage new growth.) The term *wakakusa* (young grass) is a pillow word (*makura kotoba*) for *tsuma*, which means both the tips of the grass sprouting from the ground and ‘spouse’.

13

Stirrups of Musashi

[Episode 13](#) is distinguished by the virtuosity of the verbal play in the poems. The tale describes an exchange of poems between the hero, now in Musashi (see previous episode), and his former beloved in the capital. The word *abumi* (stirrups) plays an important rhetorical role. There are many conflicting interpretations of its meaning; Katagiri, for example, asserts that it should be read as *aumi* (to meet), as *abumi* and *aumi* were written in the same way at the time. The word also appears in the expression ‘to place one’s feet in the stirrups’ (*abumi / sasuga ni kakete* in the transliteration), which in turn evokes the expression ‘to be attached to someone’ (*kokoro ni kaku*) through a play on the word *kaku* (rendered *kakaru* in the transliteration), of which one form is *kakete*, as above. The word *kakaru* itself is used in a wide variety of phrases and idioms, the meaning depending on context, but with the general sense of some kind of attachment, both physical and emotional.

The inscription of the letter – *Musashi abumi* – is thus a kind of riddle: ‘I have placed my feet in the stirrups to leave you far behind but, having journeyed far, I still think of you.’ The hero’s comment in the letter itself, ‘Should I tell you, it would make me blush’, implies that certain circumstances have led to his parting from the lady and his embarrassment in writing after such a lapse of time.

In her poem, the lady develops the metaphor of the stirrups by cleverly punning on the word *sasuga*. As a noun, it means ‘metal buckles’ (of the stirrups); coupled with *ni*, as in *sasuga ni*, it means ‘in

spite of that; none the less', translated here as 'still'. Thus the whole phrase *sasuga ni kakete* may be rendered: 'as I am still attached to you'.

According to Katagiri, Takeoka and others, the second poem concerns the confession of a two-timer. In other words, the hero has been unfaithful, and the stirrups hanging from either side of the saddle express his dilemma and embarrassment. The word *kakeru* can also be seen as punning on part of the expression *futamata o kakeru*, which means being unfaithful or 'two-timing'. This translation follows Yamamoto's version, which seems more in keeping with the tone of the work as a whole. Katagiri's version could be rendered in the same way in English but with the addition of the word 'love-torn' before 'Stirrups of Musashi' in the fourth line.

In the second poem, the Musashi stirrups create yet another pun on *kakaru*, a verbal inflexion of *kakeru*, here meaning 'in such and such a situation/at times like this' (*kaku aru*). While some interpreters believe that the hero recites the poem to himself, others consider it to be a reply to the lady, which is how I have chosen to present it.

14

Cocooning with Silkworms

Episode 14 provides a clear illustration of a common motif in the *Tales*: the disdain of the nobility in the capital for country dwellers. The poems by the country girl in this episode deliberately employ a number of expressions that appear in many poems in the *Man'yōshū*, which by the Heian period were regarded as rustic and unsophisticated. Indeed, the girl's first poem is a reworking of one in the *Man'yōshū* (no. 3086), its inclusion intended to illustrate her own lack of sophistication.

The first poem, based on the conceit that the male and female silkworms live together inside one cocoon, appears to be a metaphor for a loving couple. But just as the silkworm is killed when the silk thread is removed, it also stands for the transience of life. To contemporary readers, the development of the metaphor in the poem may seem quite accomplished, but when read by Heian-period readers of the capital, the use of the image of the silkworm – which was bred domestically for making silk – to suggest evanescence, and the rough language of the poem, would have appeared rather uncouth. A poet in the capital would have been more likely to use the short-lived mayfly as a symbol of the ephemeral.

The second poem also highlights the woman's countrified ways and lack of sophistication. It includes a number of dialect words and colloquialisms: *kitsu* (a dialect word for 'water trough', translated as

‘pail’ here); *hamenade* (‘to dunk’ – perhaps another word in the local dialect); *kutakake* (used for swearing at fowl); and *sena* (used by women to refer to men).

The third poem reveals the hero’s contempt for the young woman. It is probably a reworking of an anonymous poem in the *Kokinshū* (no. 1090), to which it is almost identical. The ‘pine tree / of Aneha in Kurihara’ was famous throughout the Michinoku region. Used as a metaphor for the girl, it suggests that the poet regards her as a country bumpkin. If only she had been more refined (‘if only [she’d] been human’ rather than a rustic ‘pine tree’), he would have taken her to the capital with him.

The heartless treatment of the country girl is what stands out in this episode. She is criticized for her foolish joy based on her misunderstanding of the hero’s behaviour and his poem. The hero impolitely leaves her in the middle of the night, when custom would have demanded that he stay until morning, and recites a rather offensive poem that she misunderstands. Her inability to recognize the way she is being treated emphasizes the naivety of her character and would have suggested to the Heian-period reader that her cruel treatment is deserved.

province of Michinoku: See the commentary to [Episode 1](#).

crowing too early: See [crowing of the cock](#).

the man recited a poem: See [kinuginu no uta](#) (‘morning-after’ poem).

15

A Pathway to the Heart

This is the penultimate episode in the series that began in [Episode 7](#) concerning the hero’s journey to the eastern provinces. [Episode 116](#) is in fact the final one in the series, reflecting how there is no particular order in the placing of these and other episodes as they were compiled by multiple authors over a long period of time, mixed and matched in various ways as the work progressed (see [here](#)).

As in the previous episode, the disdain for country people is clear in the expression ‘the wife of a common fellow’, which implies that, from the perspective of a court aristocrat, the husband was a man with no redeeming features. Despite that, the hero falls for his wife. By contrast, in the final sentence, the narrator implies that little could be gained from gazing into the heart of such a rustic woman. Though the hero himself does not look down upon the woman, the narrator does, and the gap between the two is significant. The last sentence can also be read ironically, in which case the criticism is less severe.

Michinoku: See the commentary to [Episode 1](#).

Mount Shinobu: The poem plays on the place name Mount Shinobu (*Shinobūyama*; see [Map 1](#)), which is located in the northern part of present-day Fukushima city. The name here acts as a ‘preface’ (*jokotoba*) introducing *shinobu* (‘in secret’).

16

Robes of a Heavenly Maiden

This episode provides one of the best illustrations of friendship in the *Tales*, though the relationship between the actual historical figures is concealed. Ki no **Aritsune**, in reality **Narihira**’s father-in-law, is introduced here as a friend, and no mention is made that his daughter was Narihira’s wife (see the commentary to [Episode 19](#)). Aritsune’s younger sister was Shizuko, the mother of **Prince Koretaka** and Princess Yasuko, later the Priestess of Ise at the Ise Shrine (see [Episode 69](#)). If Prince Koretaka had become emperor, both the Ki and Ariwara families would have thrived. However, in the second half of the ninth century the northern branch of the Fujiwara family was in the ascendant. The head of the family at the time, **Yoshifusa**, succeeded in marrying his daughter Akirakeiko (see [Somedono Empress](#)) to **Emperor Montoku** and in establishing her son Korehito as crown prince instead of Koretaka. In his position as chancellor, Yoshifusa wielded great political power, enabling him to place Korehito on the throne while he was still a boy. After his grandson’s ascension as **Emperor Seiwa**, Yoshifusa became regent, initiating a period of direct control of court affairs by Fujiwara regents that lasted for several hundred years. Despite being eclipsed in power by the Fujiwara clan, the Ki and Ariwara families remained tied by bonds of deep friendship.

All of the episodes, including this one, that give the actual names of their protagonists were composed at a later stage of the *Tales*. The preference for using real names and appearing to narrate historical fact rather than fiction (though they actually mix both) marks a change of style in the *Tales*. Several episodes seem to stand alone in the *Tales*, and this is one of them. It is not known why it was placed immediately after the sequence concerning the journey to the east, but it shares the theme of friendship with the first part of the journey (see [Episodes 8 and 9](#)).

This episode describes Aritsune as a man of great integrity, who, desisting from fawning on the powerful, maintains a life of honest poverty. In reality, as a courtier of fairly high rank, the historical Aritsune is likely to have been well off. The episode should be read, instead, as a sympathetic account of the nobility of mind of people

who live cut off from the centre of power.

The first poem can be interpreted as saying that Arisune had been married to his wife for either four decades or fourteen years. Forty years is the standard interpretation – and one that I have followed – though Katagiri argues that this would be too long and that a woman in her sixties would not abandon her husband. In the third poem, Arisune's praise of the robes he receives as 'celestial' is a reference to a legend – mentioned also in the tenth-century *Taketori monogatari* (Tale of the Bamboo Cutter), one of the oldest narrative tales in Japan with a great influence on subsequent literature – according to which 'celestial robes' (*ama no hagoromo*) were worn by heavenly beings as they flew through the skies. The word *ama* (celestial) puns on *ama* (nun).

There are many fictional elements in the episode. For example, it is unlikely that Arisune's friend really gave his own used clothes to the lady, though it was, indeed, a custom at the time for a man of high status to give the robes he had been wearing to a person of lower rank – usually male, though sometimes female – as a mark of special esteem. [Episode 62](#) provides one such example. Here, Narihira, as the grandson of two emperors, would have actually been of higher status than Arisune. It is also more likely that, rather than his own clothing, he would present a garment appropriate for a nun.

He ended the letter with a poem: See **poetic exchanges between men**.

17

Fickle Blossoms

The remarkable feature of [Episode 17](#) is the ostensible love exchange between two men. Male poetic exchanges occur several times in the *Tales* (see **poetic exchanges between men**); it was not uncommon for men to assume a female persona during such exchanges (see [gender mixing](#)), of which there are many examples in the other great works of the period, including the *Kokinshū* and *The Tale of Genji*. The 'host' (*aruji*) in this episode has been interpreted both as a man and as a woman, though it is most likely a man; the visitor is **Narihira**. In the first poem, the poet compares himself to cherry blossoms, protesting sarcastically that he has been waiting faithfully the entire year for a friend who hardly visits. The friend asserts in reply that had he come the following day instead, the host's feelings would have changed, as they are like the fickle cherry blossoms that perish quickly and 'scatter like snow'. Both poems appear in the *Kokinshū* (nos. 62 and 63), not in the section on 'Love' but in the one on 'Spring'. The text of the

headnote to each of the poems there is similar to that in the *Tales*, suggesting that the exchange was not read as one between lovers but, rather, as one between two close male friends teasing each other.

An interesting feature of this episode is that it is the only one in the *Tales* that does not begin in the original Japanese with the words ‘long ago’ (*mukashi* – see [here](#)), which has puzzled commentators down the ages. Despite centuries of exegetical work, the reason for the omission is unclear and likely to remain so.

18

From White to Red

Noteworthy in this episode is the way in which the hero subtly rebuffs the lady by blithely pretending to be unaware of her entreaties. Most rebuffs in the *Tales* are colder or more inflamed with passion. The term *shirazu yomi* means to pretend not to understand the meaning of a letter when replying, and the reply in this episode is of this kind. Katagiri, agreeing with the early Edo-period scholar Keichu (1640–1701), asserts that this episode is very similar in atmosphere to poems by Tsurayuki (see [here](#)), the main editor of the prestigious poetic collection the *Kokinshū*. The poems in question may be found in the *Tsurayuki-shū* (nos. 860 and 861), and there is, indeed, a strong possibility that this episode was based on this pair of poems.

In the first poem, the lady complains that she can see no indication of the man’s reputed qualities as a passionate lover: ‘where is passion’s red?’ she teases. The way in which white chrysanthemums turned slightly reddish-purple when touched by frost was considered extremely beautiful. Indeed, the change of colour was repeatedly celebrated in poems of the Heian period. The man’s reply, while cleverly incorporating the same phrase (*Kurenai ni / niou*) – ‘passionate red’ in the first poem and ‘sensual red’ in the second – deliberately ignores the lady’s intended challenge and focuses only on the colour of her sleeve. But at the same time it also gives the impression that the lady’s sleeve is partially red – like the chrysanthemum – and thus she is the real mistress of passion. Ladies of the nobility wore several robes of different colours, and these layers, slightly separated – an effect known as *kasane* (layering) – were visible at the sleeves and hem.

Commentators are divided about whether the person in the opening section, referred to as a writer of poems, was the hero or the lady, but from the context it seems clear that it was the lady. Being ‘confident in her ability’, she decides to test the man. The word *namagokoro* (literally, ‘raw heart’) has invited a number of interpretations, from ‘second rate’ and ‘inexperienced’ to ‘pretentious’; in the pre-modern

period, it was thought to mean ‘fickle’. It is translated here as ‘of affected ways’.

19

A Raging Gale

Worth noting in [Episode 19](#) is the way in which poems from another text are placed in a new fictional setting (an innovative feature of the *Tales* – see [here](#)). Both poems in this episode appear in the *Kokinshū* (nos. 784 and 785), but the headnote to the first differs considerably from the text of the *Tales*. According to the *Kokinshū* headnote, **Narihira** and his wife (**Aritsune’s daughter**) had quarrelled, and for a while he visited her only in the daytime and not at night. After some time, she sent him the first poem, to which Narihira replied with the second poem (the first two lines of the second poem in the *Kokinshū* read slightly differently: ‘Coming and going / I live only within the sky’ – *yukikaeri / sora ni nomi shite*). In the *Tales*, the marital quarrel is changed into a tale of a workplace love affair centring on a lady who cheats on her lover, and as both parties serve as nobles at court, they cannot avoid seeing each other even after their estrangement.

The first poem accuses the hero of being ‘as distant / as clouds in the sky’. The reply cleverly employs the metaphor of the ‘gale / raging on the mountain’ to accuse the lady of having an affair with another man and thus of being the cause of the cloud’s inability to embrace the mountain.

they both served at court: The word *miyazukae* (serving the emperor or a person of noble birth), referring originally to serving only the emperor at the palace, came to refer also to serving high-born aristocrats. The setting of this episode, however, is still most likely the court, and that is how I have translated the word here.

20

No Such Thing as Spring

This is one of several episodes that describe the damage to love affairs caused by the hero when he leaves or returns to the capital (see also [Episodes 24](#) and [115](#)). Such depictions are another example of the way in which the *Tales* influenced *The Tale of Genji*, with Genji’s departure from the capital also being the cause of heartbreak.

In the first poem, the hero compares his passionate feelings to red maple leaves and attaches his poem to a maple branch when he sends it. Here, ‘maple’ refers to young shoots of late spring that have reddened, rather than the red maple leaves of autumn. The third

month of the **lunisolar calendar** – translated as ‘the end of spring’ – falls between the present-day 20 April and 20 May, when trees sprout new leaves. (For further commentary on this poem, see [here](#).)

This episode is remarkable for the lady’s humorous retort, which puns on two words: *aki*, which means both ‘autumn’ and ‘to grow tired of’; and *utsurou*, which can mean both ‘to change colour’/‘to fade’ and ‘to tire of’ one’s partner as love fades. The man’s poem refers to ‘autumn’, but the lady cleverly turns it on its head by invoking the other meaning of the word.

Punning on these words was extremely common in classical poetry, and countless examples may be found. The lady’s sophistication here is shown not only in her witty reply but also in her timing its delivery after the hero’s arrival at the capital.

a lady of whom he had caught a glimpse: See [kaimami \(glimpsing\)](#).
Yamato: The ancient province of Yamato (see [Map 2](#)) covered approximately the same area as the present-day Nara Prefecture.

21

Seeds of the Forgetting-Grass

As Katagiri points out, perhaps the best way to read [Episode 21](#) is to see it as forming a pair with [Episode 22](#), just as [Episodes 14](#) and [15](#) can most fruitfully be read together. All four episodes illustrate similar situations in which the hero’s relationship with two separate women ends differently.

In [Episode 21](#), the woman leaves the hero, and although they rekindle the relationship, they end up going their separate ways. [Episode 22](#) illustrates a nearly identical situation, in which the woman leaves, but the episode concludes with the man and woman having an even stronger love than before. Each episode documents a failure followed by a success in the relationship between the man and the woman. The extended exchange of poems is another noteworthy aspect of [Episodes 21](#) and [22](#).

The lady writes the first poem on a surface somewhere within the house as she leaves. In the Japanese, it is not stated whether it is a wall or pillar, or whose house it is, but, for clarity, I have translated it as ‘a wall in their house’. There are many similar instances in both Chinese and Japanese literature of songs or poems being written upon departure on a wall, pillar or other such surface within a house.

In the second poem, the hero laments the loss of the lady whom he loves with all his heart. In the third, he expresses how he is unable to forget the lady and haunted by a ‘lingering image’ (*omokage*) of her. In the Heian world, reference to a vision of this kind in dreams or

elsewhere expressed deep love. There is a similar poem in the *Man'yōshū* (no. 149) in which the poet sees the other person before him in the form of a vision or as an illusion, and elements of this are thought to have been included here (see also [Episodes 46](#) and [63](#)). The fourth poem is from the lady, who is no longer able to refrain from letting the hero know her true feelings. She tells him that she does not want him to sow the 'seeds of the forgetting-grass' (*wasuregusa*) in his heart – that is, that she does not want him to forget her. It was said that if a person planted forgetting-grass, he would forget the past, though it is unlikely that they were actually planted by heartbroken lovers.

The fifth poem, a reply to the fourth, is open to different interpretations. In Katagiri's view, the hero is stating that if he heard that the lady was planting forgetting-grass, then he would know that she had been thinking of him. This interpretation seems to be the most straightforward, and the one that fits best with the rest of the narrative. Fukui's interpretation suggests, by contrast, that it is the man who is sowing the seeds: 'If you heard I sow / forgetting-grass seeds, / what can it mean / but that up to now, / I was thinking of you.' As with so many of the episodes in the *Tales*, it is this sort of ambiguity that creates both challenges for the translator and pleasures for the reader.

In the sixth poem, the hero says he is filled with doubt that she might forget him, which causes him even greater sadness. There is a similar poem in the *Kokinshū* (no. 718), of which this may be an adaptation. In the seventh poem, the lady compares herself to a fleeting cloud, unable to return to her former life. The word 'mid-air' (*nakazora*), referring to the space between the sky and the earth, is a metaphor for being in a state that is neither one thing nor another.

Breaking into tears: See *otoko naki* (crying of men).

[Episode 22](#) is unusual in that it describes a mostly happy and passionate relationship between two lovers, whereas many episodes in the *Tales* end in tears. As noted above, this episode forms a pair with [Episode 21](#), where further commentary may be found.

A lady who parts from the hero just after their affair has blossomed sends him a poem, and as a result they become much closer than before. In the hero's reply, the word *kawashima* acts as a pun that also functions as a pivot word (see *kakekotoba*) linking *kawashi* (exchanging (feelings of love)) and *kawashima* (island in the middle of

a river): just as the waters of the river flow on uninterruptedly on both sides of an island, so the hero wants their love to continue despite the temporary rupture. The hero's poem suggests that he is prepared to wait patiently for a long time. 'Despite saying that', the narrator dryly observes, he goes to see his beloved that very night.

The third poem employs the metaphor of counting autumn nights, since in both Japanese poetry (*waka*) and Chinese verse, autumn nights are said to be the longest of the year. I have changed 'eight thousand' to 'ten thousand' in the translation as it is more idiomatic in English, and both simply mean many, many nights. There is no clear consensus on whether the author of this poem was the hero or the lady, but it was common practice for the man to send the first poem in this situation (see [here](#)). The fourth poem, a response to the third, speaks of the lady's love, too deep to be described in words, even if she had a thousand long autumn nights to do so. The mention of the **crowing of the cock** is a standard expression for the man having to return home in the morning.

23

The Measuring Well

[Episode 23](#) has been one of the most popular and widely read of the *Tales* since the time of its completion. The famous **Noh** play *Izutsu* ('The Measuring Well' or 'The Well Cradle') is based on it, and it has been widely illustrated in art. Along with [Episodes 6](#) and [9](#), it is one of the episodes that have come to represent the work as a whole. The tale's unevenness – in its latter part, the focus shifts to the second wife, diluting the force of the first section – has not detracted from its popularity.

Structurally, [Episode 23](#) can be divided into three parts: (1) the first two love poems; (2) the third (and most well-known) poem, by the first wife; (3) the fourth and fifth poems by the second wife. Since the third poem (part 2) is also found in the *Kokinshū* (no. 994), with an almost identical commentary, it is thought that [Episode 23](#) was initially based on this and that the first and third parts were added later.

In the first poem, the hero seeks the lady's hand. The poem displays one of the finest examples of alliteration in the *Tales: Tsutsuitsu no / izutsu*. The word *tsutsui* describes a round (or tubular) well, while *izutsu* is the rim. Thus *Tsutsuitsu no izutsu* is the rim of a round well.

The second poem is the lady's response to the hero. The word *furiwakegami* denotes a child's hairstyle – parted in the middle and falling to the shoulders – that was common in both girls and boys. The verb *agu* (in the form *agubeki* in the poem), literally 'to put up', refers

to the ceremony of ‘putting up one’s hair’ (*kami-age*), which was a girl’s coming-of-age ritual, as was a similar one known as *mogi* (donning adult robes). In many instances, ‘putting up one’s hair’ took place at the time of a girl’s betrothal. ‘If not to wed you, / for whom shall I put it up?’ refers to the original form of the ceremony, in which it was the prospective husband who tied up the girl’s hair. At the time that the *Tales* was composed, the act was usually performed by an elder member of the family.

The two marry as they wish, but after the wife’s parents die, things become difficult financially. As it was the wife’s family that maintained the husband (see [here](#)), the hero seeks economic support by marrying a second, wealthier lady living in Takayasu (see [Map 2](#)), now part of the present-day city of Yao in Osaka Prefecture. Suspicious that his wife does not seem to resent his visits to his new wife, he hides in the garden to spy on her – an example of ‘watching in secret’ or *kaimami* (see also [Episodes 1](#) and [63](#)). With her husband gone, the woman attends to her appearance and composes a poem to express her fears for her husband as he crosses Mount Tatsuta on the way to Kawachi. The first two lines, ‘As the wild winds blow / and the white waves rise’ (*Kaze fukeba / oki tsu shiranami*), serve as a preface (*jokotoba*) for *tatsu* (to rise) as it appears in the fourth line within *Tatsuta-yama* or Mount Tatsuta (see [Map 2](#)), part of the Ikoma mountain range on the border of Yamato (present-day Nara Prefecture) and Kawachi (Osaka Prefecture).

The lady in Takayasu, who at first acts in a refined way in the hero’s presence, eventually begins to display vulgar behaviour – for example, by serving rice to her household servants herself. A head of the household apportioning rice as remuneration for the work of her servants would have been a common sight among wealthy commoners that employed servants, but the hero is an aristocrat through and through, and, despite his living in the countryside, finds it distasteful. The fourth and fifth poems are by the lady in Takayasu, as the narrative focus shifts to her from the first wife.

some people living in the countryside: Various interpretations have been given for the ‘people’ here, the most likely being that they were members of the nobility who had once lived in the capital before being sent as officials to the country, where they then settled.

Despite the somewhat far-fetched ending, [Episode 24](#) is one of the most poignant of the *Tales*. Like [Episode 23](#) (see the commentary

above), it contains a poem that makes particularly fine use of alliteration.

Like [Episode 23](#), to which this story forms a good contrast, [Episode 24](#) takes place in the countryside. A husband and wife live in a remote place, but the husband, wishing to find a position as a court official, leaves for the capital without returning for three years. Unable to wait any longer, the wife promises herself in marriage to another man on the very day that the original husband returns. The ‘new pillow’ (*niimakura*) the lady mentions in the first poem refers to a man and woman spending the first night of their marriage together.

The second poem, a reply to the first, is based on a traditional folk song. The first two lines (*Azusa-yumi / ma-yumi tsuki-yumi*), full of beautiful alliteration in the Japanese, refer to three types of bow, made of different kinds of wood, though the underlying meaning is unclear. One theory is that since men of the time always carried a bow with them and handled it with great care, it represents something of importance to the man. This is the view of Yamamoto, who argues that the poem should be read as a plea from the first husband to the new one: ‘Just as a man handles a bow carefully, I have cherished my wife. Take care of her as I have done.’ The more standard interpretation, adopted in this translation, is that the man is comparing the long-stretched bow of the moon (*tsuki*) to his love, and the poem is addressed to his wife.

The third poem also uses the bow as a metaphor to speak of the lady’s love for her former husband. When the bow is drawn, the frame bends and the ends come closer. This conceit of a bent bow was often used in the poetry of the time. Here, the lady asserts that, as in the past, her heart is drawn to his at all times. The translation is a slight adaptation of this conceit. Many poems in the *Man’yōshū* use a similar expression, and this poem is thought to have been based on them. The husband ignores the lady’s poems and leaves. She runs after him but is unable to catch him and collapses beside a spring. She writes the fourth poem on a nearby rock with the blood draining from her finger and then dies in despair. The melodramatic ending, unusual in this work, is surely another form of literary experimentation (see [here](#)), and may even have been read as somewhat comical.

[Episode 25](#) has several noteworthy features: the adaptation of two poems that appear next to each other in the *Kokinshū* into an exchange that gave rise to the legend that *Narihira* and the legendary poet Ono no Komachi (see [here](#)) were lovers; the introduction of the

‘fickle lady’ (*irogonomi* – see [here](#)) who appears in several other episodes of the *Tales*; and the first use of the image of seaweed (*mirume*), which also appears repeatedly.

The man’s poem plays on the trope that a lover always returns home crying at dawn, when the lovers must part: his sleeves are wetter from tears shed during the nights he has to spend alone than they would be if he had pushed his way through the bamboo grasses on the autumn plain covered in dew. This poem is included in the *Kokinshū* (no. 622, attributed to Narihira), with slightly different wording in the fourth line (*awade koshi yo zo*). In this version, the poet goes to the lady’s house but cannot meet her and so comes home alone. In the *Tales* version, he simply indicates that he could not meet her and must sleep alone. Both versions of the poem are typical of the skill of Narihira in that drops of dew and teardrops are implied but not actually stated. The translation also avoids mentioning these words.

The fickle lady is clearly adept in the affairs of love and takes pleasure in the pursuit of romantic liaisons (see also [Episodes 28](#) and [37](#)). In the second poem, she coldly rebuffs the hero, who had been trying to arrange a rendezvous, without any inkling of her true feelings. The poem plays on the word *Mirume*, often employed in love poetry as it means both a kind of seaweed and ‘to meet one’s beloved’. ‘Shores’ (*ura*) and ‘fisherfolk’ (*ama*; translated here as ‘Man of the sea’) are associative words (*engo*) of ‘seaweed’ (*Mirume*). The word *ura* also suggests sorrow (*u*) and resentment (*urami*).

This poem also appears in the *Kokinshū* (no. 623), where it is attributed to Ono no Komachi (see [here](#)). However, the two poems were not originally written as a pair and just happened to be placed one after the other in the *Kokinshū*. This episode is considered fictional, created out of the juxtaposition of the two *Kokinshū* poems to make them appear to be an exchange between the hero and the fickle lady. In classical Japanese literature, the second poem is expected to be based closely on the first. There is a discordance here, however, because the first poem is clearly about autumn, whereas the poem written in reply is about seaweed – another indication that this episode was written after the positioning of the poems in the *Kokinshū*.

Both the poetry and the prose in this episode are difficult to decipher. Some commentators assert that the poem described in the opening lines is written by the hero in reply to the lady he has failed to win; others maintain that the poem is a sympathetic response from the

person addressed by the hero when he laments that he has failed to win the lady. Fukui argues that the poem is by the hero in reply to a sympathetic letter from a friend – and this is the interpretation adopted here. The ‘lady who lived on the Fifth Avenue’ is thought to allude to Takaiko, who later became the **Empress of the Second Avenue** (see [Episodes 3, 4 and 5](#)).

The poem itself can be interpreted in different ways, and the one I have chosen follows Yamamoto. Trading ships from China (*Morokoshi-bune*) always appeared unannounced in Japanese ports, so the supportive letter from the hero’s friend, in arriving so unexpectedly, is likened to a ship from China, and moves him to tears. Because they were so large, the ships made ‘great waves’ when they came into port, which provides the central image for the poem, ‘the harbour of my sleeves’ (*sode ni minato*) – a beautiful metaphor for the great quantity of tears shed, as well as indicating that the hero cried into his sleeves. Wetting one’s sleeves with tears is a central trope of classical poetry and there are countless examples. (See also *otoko naki* (crying of men).)

27

Frogs in Pairs

The most interesting features of [Episode 27](#) are the hero’s listening in secret, which acts as a pivot for the action of the tale, and the second poem, which has given rise to multiple interpretations.

The slatted cover mentioned was woven from bamboo. The nobility of the time would hold their hands over a basin, and a maid would pour water over them; the bamboo cover was placed over part of the basin to prevent water from splashing back over the person. When the lady removes the cover, she sees her face reflected in the water and remarks that there is a grieving person’s face beneath the water. It was a common device in the poetry of the time to pretend to mistake an image reflected in the water for something underwater.

In the second poem, the hero claims that the face the lady saw in the water was in fact his own. Likening himself to a frog that cries together (*morogoe*: literally, ‘join voices together to sing’; translated as ‘cry in pairs’) with other frogs, he says that she is not the only one to grieve, because she makes many men cry. (See also [Episode 108](#).) It is not clear from the text whether the poem is sent to the lady or spoken as a soliloquy, but the latter is more probable. Though the hero overhears the lady’s poem, it is likely that she has no idea that he has composed a poem in response.

The second line of his poem, *ware ya miyuran*, can be read as either ‘Did you see me?’ or ‘Did you see yourself?’ If read as the former, then

it suggests that the hero is protesting that he also cries, with many other men, all of whom she has reduced to tears. If read as the latter, it implies that the lady sees her own face, which the man, jilted in love, compares to a frog's. Takeoka takes this view, but other scholars (Katagiri, Yamamoto and others) claim that the *ware* of the poem refers to the hero rather than the lady, and I believe this interpretation is correct.

frogs: Frogs (*kawazu*), which often appear in Japanese poetry of the time, are mentioned in the preface to the *Kokinshū*, the most authoritative guide in classical Japanese literature on what constitutes a suitable topic for poetry. In classical literature, frogs have a positive image, as reflected in the reference to them in the *Kokinshū* preface: 'Of all living things is there not one that does not sing?'

28

Cupped Hands

In [Episode 28](#) the inconstancy of the lady is contrasted with the single-minded loyalty of the hero, as revealed in his poem to her in which he laments the breaking of what he believed was a firm pledge of love between them. The reappearance of the figure of the 'fickle lady' (*irogonomi* – see [here](#) and [Episodes 25, 27 and 42](#)) and the technical brilliance of the poem are the most noteworthy features of this episode.

The poem contains a number of puns that help reinforce its message: the word *augo*, pronounced *ōgo*, puns on 'carrying pole' and 'an opportunity to meet' (*afugo*); *katami* puns on 'small bamboo basket' and 'difficult'; and *musubu* (in the form *musubishi* in the poem) plays on both 'to scoop up water' and 'to pledge to each other'. The use of associative words (*engo*) concerned with drawing water, such as 'carrying pole', 'bamboo basket', 'scoop up' and 'spilling', enriches the underlying metaphor.

29

The Cherry Blossom Banquet

[Episode 29](#) features a well-constructed laudatory poem appropriate to a formal occasion, a blossom-viewing celebration held by the mother of the crown prince. Though he has enjoyed many such splendid occasions in the past, in the eyes of the hero none compares to this one.

The cherry blossom party (*hana no ga*) was held to mark a decennial

birthday. During this period in Japan, birthdays were not celebrated annually, but from the fortieth year, and every decade after that a celebration was held, as much of longevity as anything else. The time of year was not fixed. Here it is held during the spring, when the cherry trees are in bloom.

The mother of the crown prince (*haru no miya*; literally, ‘the spring prince’) was the junior consort (*nyōgo* – see [imperial consorts](#)) of the emperor, hence her full title would be *haru no miya no nyōgo*. A number of headnotes in the *Kokinshū* use the expression to refer to Takaiko (**Empress of the Second Avenue**) before she became empress; some scholars take it to refer to her here as well, although by the time she turned forty, the crown prince had long since become **Emperor Yozei**, making her the Empress Mother (*kōtaigō*). It is unclear whose anniversary is being celebrated at the cherry blossom banquet, but it is natural to assume that the Empress of the Second Avenue was the host.

According to Katagiri and others, the episode is really about the affair between **Narihira** and Takaiko, whose romance forms one of the central motifs of the *Tales*, and, whether correct or not, this is a delightful way to read it.

30

A String of Threaded Gems

In [Episode 30](#), a poem is sent in grief to a lady whom the hero can only meet occasionally. The poem employs the commonly used image of the short gaps between gems threaded together (*tama no o*) to evoke the brevity of their encounter in contrast with the long period of time for which the lady has remained indifferent to the hero.

make love to a lady for only the most fleeting of moments: The expression *hatsuka narikeru onna* can mean either a lady with whom one could spend only a short time or one who is difficult to meet often, but the context of the poem suggests the former.

31

Sir Clump of Grass

[Episode 31](#) is a tale of bitter love with an unusual twist at the end. It tells of a high-ranking lady, perhaps a former lover of the hero, who reprimands him as he passes by her apartment in the palace, and his poem in reply. The basic meaning of her hostile words is: ‘Grass that seems full of vigour now will eventually wither, and that will be your eventual fate, too.’ In an instantaneous and witty reply, the hero

reproves the lady, saying that it is the one who curses an unfaithful lover who will be forgotten.

The narrator's final sentence – in which a second lady, perhaps another lover of the hero's, overhears the contretemps and feels left out – adds a comic twist to the episode. Even if the reply is cold, she is annoyed not to be the main focus of the hero's attention.

forgetting-grass: See *wasuregusa*.

32

A Spool of Love

This episode is considered to have been added to the *Tales* at a later stage, when the image of **Narihira** as an ideal lover was already well established. The poem does not appear in any of the versions of the *Narihira* (Ariwara no Narihira's personal poetry collection; see [here](#)), and in the Japanese the opening is quite different from the typical one in the *Tales*. The episode is also stylistically similar to other episodes (nos. 3, 33, 35, 53, 55, 62, 73, 110, 112 and 122) whose poems do not appear in the *Narihira*. These episodes all feature a different kind of fickle lady (*irogonomi* – see [here](#)) with whom Narihira engages – one who is unresponsive rather than inconstant – thus expanding the image of him as a lover through the range of love affairs that he conducts.

The final statement by the narrator is somewhat open-ended, typical of many endings in the *Tales*, though suggesting that the lady did not return a poem and the relationship therefore went no further. In the following episode, by contrast, the final question posed by the narrator indicates that the lady's poem could easily have invited a positive response from the hero, as the poem is an excellent one. Because of this, [Episodes 32](#) and [33](#) are often considered a contrasting pair. When the poem was good, then the hero would be more likely to respond, and that would mean that the relationship would continue. Thus, what the narrator is really asking is not just whether the poem was good but whether it was good enough to elicit a response, and hence whether or not the relationship was likely to continue as a result. See [Episodes 21](#) and [22](#) for a similar pairing of affairs – one that goes well and one that does not.

The cleverness of the poem in this episode lies in the way it puns on the word *kuri-kaeshi*, which means both 'unwinding' thread and 'winding back' to an earlier moment in time. The word *shizu* refers to a simple kind of woven fabric that has been made in Japan since antiquity. The *shizu no odamaki* is thread wound on to a spool for weaving.

Reed Ditty

Episode 33, like other episodes in the *Tales*, makes a contrast between the ways of the country and the ways of the capital, but more worthy of note is the ambiguous ending, which has generated considerable debate. Some commentators have seen the final question posed by the narrator as a condescending rejection of the countrywoman's poem, but it should be noted that the words are addressed to the reader, leaving it to him or her to decide.

Katagiri argues that the final comment appears to be written from the point of view of someone connected to the lovers and that they did in fact continue their relationship, because if it had ended negatively, the ending would have been more definitive, as in **Episode 32** – with which this episode is often paired (see also the commentary there). This would mean that the poem was good enough to pass muster and generated a reply. The wordplay on 'reeds' (see below) may also suggest a positive response.

The hero has been visiting a lady living in Ubara, and as he returns home, he gives her a poem telling her that his love for her is deepening. As the lady lives in Ubara on the coast, the poem is highly appropriate with its reference to 'reeds / along the shore'. This matching of emotion to a specific location displays the sophistication of the poet and is a defining characteristic of some of the best Heian poetry. Many similar poems existed at the time that it was written, including one in the *Man'yōshū* (no. 617); indeed, the poem in this episode is thought to be based on this or on one of its variants.

Although ostensibly by a countrywoman, the lady's reply is highly accomplished, including a beautifully developed metaphor and several puns and associative words (*engo*). The word 'pole' (*sao*) serves as a preface (*jokotoba*) for 'to plumb' (*sashite*), which also puns on 'to show clearly'. Both 'pole' and 'plumb' are associative words for 'hidden cove' (*komorie*).

the province of Settsu: This incorporates parts of present-day Osaka and Hyogo prefectures, while the Ubara District was centred on the modern-day city of Ashiya in Hyogo Prefecture. (See **Map 2** for the village of Ashiya, mentioned in **Episode 87**.)

How did her poem read?: The literal meaning of the question posed by the narrator is 'Was this good or not?' (*yoshi ya ashi ya*). But the word *ashi* also puns on the 'reeds' of the first poem. Thus the penultimate sentence, 'How did her poem read?', translates the pun on reeds in the original. The title 'Reed Ditty' is intended to suggest both the meaning of 'ditty' as a mere 'simple song' and the

contrasting, truly lyrical, ‘spirit ditties of no tone’ and ‘Delphic reeds’ of John Keats’s poetry. To give an idea of how taken readers have been with the expression *yoshi ya ashi ya*, a famous literary figure of the eighteenth century, Ueda Akinari (1734–1809), used it as the title of his commentary on the *Tales*.

34

Tempest

Much debate has been generated over the meaning of [Episode 34](#) and the narrator’s ambiguous final evaluation, presented as a conjecture. The expression *omonashi* can be read in two entirely different ways, as ‘brazen’ or as ‘swallowing his pride’. If one takes it to be the former, this sentence would read: ‘He seems to have bared his heart without any sense of shame.’ The other interpretation, preferred by Yamamoto and others, is the one presented here: ‘He seems to have swallowed his pride and bared his heart.’ (For more on the difficulties posed in translation by this and other episodes, see ‘Note on the Translation and Text’, [here](#).)

cold-hearted lady: For more on the theme of the ‘fickle lady’ (*irogonomi*), see [here](#).

35

A Loosely Tied Knot

The poem sent by the hero in this episode in the hope of rekindling an affair revolves around the word *awao*, which is extremely difficult to translate. A somewhat similar poem appears in the *Man’yōshū* (no. 763), but *ahao* (the original spelling of the poem in the *Tales*, according to the rules of early *kana* orthography – see Appendix 4, [here](#)) is used instead of *awao*. It is thought to mean a knot that easily comes undone. This is the view of Katagiri, and I have followed this interpretation. However, Yamamoto points out that the word *awao* may also be understood in the opposite way, as a knot that is difficult to loosen. No consensus has been reached about the meaning; the interpretation is up to the reader.

a string of gems: See *tama no o*.

36

A Hardy Vine

In [Episode 36](#), the poem that the hero sends to the lady who has

accused him of forgetting her is a reworking of no. 3507 in the *Man'yōshū* (see [here](#)). It also acts as a foil for the 'Creeping Vine' in [Episode 118](#). While both poems use the word 'vine' (*tamakazura*), the one in [Episode 118](#) has entirely different connotations from the poem here, where it signifies undying affection.

37

Morning Glory

[Episode 37](#) features two poems concerning an undersash (*shitahimo*), by which a lady's undergarments were secured. As undoing it denoted a physical relationship between a man and a woman, the image often appears in love poetry (see also [Episode 111](#)). According to tradition, when a woman was loved by someone, her undersash would loosen of its own accord.

The first poem also uses the image of the Japanese morning glory (*Ipomoea nil*), which is both the plant commonly known by that name today and a general term for plants that flower in the early morning, such as balloon flowers (*Platycodon grandiflorus*) and rose mallow (*Hibiscus syriacus*). The morning glory is said to have been brought to Japan from China in the late Nara period (710–94). Growing on vines, the flowers open their petals in the morning and then close them again in the afternoon. They bloom from summer until autumn. Because of the shortness of the blooming period, the morning glory was widely used in poetry as a metaphor for something that is fleeting and changeable. Here, too, it is used with the meaning 'to fade quickly', just as the lady's love for the hero may evaporate. The word *yūkage* (dusk) literally means 'the light of the evening sun'.

The episode concerns a poetic exchange between the hero and a fickle lady (*irogonomi* – see [here](#); see also [Episodes 25](#) and [42](#)). The hero sends the first poem on his return home after visiting the lady, as he suspects that she has cheated on him; the second poem is her assurance that she is not. There is a similar poem in the *Man'yōshū* (no. 2919), of which this seems to be a reworking or a variant. On its own, it is a straightforward love poem, displaying no reaction to the rebuke about inconstancy expressed in the first poem. In its appeal to pure love, the second poem shows how skilful the lady is being as she endeavours to keep the man's heart captive while cleverly avoiding his accusations.

38

The Meaning of Love

[Episode 38](#) features a humorous exchange between the hero, who is

visiting the house of the absent Ki no **Aritsune**, and Aritsune himself, who returns later. Aritsune was the father-in-law of Ariwara no **Narihira**. However, in the *Tales* he is fictionalized as the hero's friend, as in [Episode 16](#).

In the first poem the hero states that he had not known until now what it is that the world calls 'love', but thanks to his friend's returning late, he has come to understand it well, and he teasingly chides Aritsune for being late. The hero's declaration that he is a stranger to love is highly ironic and would have been certain to provoke amusement, as Narihira was regarded as the model lover. The usual object of 'love' in poetry is someone of the opposite sex, but the verb *kou* (to think of lovingly), from which the noun *koi* (love) derives, has a broad range of meanings, including the love of a friend. In the Heian world, there is nothing unnatural about using 'love' playfully with regard to a male friend. (See also **poetic exchanges between men**.)

In his reply, Aritsune implies that he also has no idea what the meaning of love is and is in no position to teach it to anyone, thereby sharing with the hero the joke about inexperience in love. This episode is similar to [Episode 48](#) in that both express the agony of waiting for a loved friend who does not appear.

39

The Glow of Fireflies

The main point of interest of this episode is the brilliant and witty exchange of love poems, each based on the *Lotus Sutra*. The most influential Buddhist scripture in Japan, this text stresses the eternal nature of the Buddha, describes how to achieve enlightenment, and prophesies universal buddhahood.

Because the hero, **Narihira**, is celebrated for having made love to women in all kinds of settings, it is ironic that in this episode it is he who determines one place that is inappropriate for lovemaking. The fact that he does so while ensconced in a lady's carriage adds wry humour to the story.

The 'Emperor of the Western Pavilion', **Emperor Junna**, had a daughter, **Princess Takaiko**, who died on the fifteenth day of the fifth month in 848 at the age of eighteen. In the story, the hero, who was living next door to the princess, goes out to see off the cortège, riding in an ox-drawn carriage with a lady. In pre-modern Japan, only close family members accompanied the deceased from their home to the cremation ground or the graveyard, while others paid their respects from the side of the road.

The phrase 'one of the most famous gallants in all the land' is the

translation for *ame no shita no irogonomi*. Here, ‘gallant’ is used to translate the term *irogonomi*, previously translated as ‘fickle’ in relation to women. This is one of the few times in the *Tales* when the term is used to refer to a man (see [here](#) for further discussion of the term). **Itaru**, the gallant in question, assumes that a woman is riding alone inside the carriage and begins to flirt with her. This would be par for the course usually – but not at a funeral.

Wanting to see the lady’s face, Itaru releases fireflies inside the carriage to illuminate the darkness, but the hero catches them to extinguish their light, thereby protecting his high-born companion from being seen by a man she does not know. The exquisite trope of seeing a lady’s face by the light of fireflies, introduced in this episode, was taken up again in later works, such as the *Utsuho monogatari* (see below) and *The Tale of Genji*.

In the first poem, the hero reproaches Itaru for his impolite behaviour and for failing to respect their grief. The words *tomoshi kechi* (literally, ‘the flame has gone out’) form a pun (**kakekotoba**) referring to both the death of the princess and the extinguished light of the fireflies. The phrase is thought to be based on an account of the Buddha’s death included in the introductory episode of the *Lotus Sutra* and elsewhere.

In the first two lines of the second poem, Itaru states that he, too, is sad (*Ito aware*) at hearing the sound of weeping. The following three lines are reminiscent of a passage in the ‘Tactfulness’ chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, which states that though the Buddha has died, it does not mean he has actually ceased to exist. The poem seems to offer a suggestion of comfort in grief, though it is difficult to decipher its exact meaning. Like the first poem, it includes the line *tomoshi kechi*, thereby forming a link between the two in a sophisticated, witty exchange of wicked humour that must have delighted readers at the time.

From the Kamakura period (1185–1333), **waka** and the *Tales* were often interpreted through the lens of Buddhist teachings and much of it was influenced by sexual imagery. The Tachikawa school of Shingon Esoteric Buddhism, for example, expounded the notion that the joining of male and female led to enlightenment, an interpretation that held great sway into the middle of the Muromachi period (1336–1573). Elsewhere, Narihira is presented as an incarnation of the Horsehead Kannon, who leads the women with whom he had relationships to the world of enlightenment through sex. Humorous or delightful though they may be, these readings of the *Tales* are arbitrary, however, and do little to deepen our understanding of the text.

At the end of the episode, the narrator evaluates Itaru’s poem with

one damning word, *nao*, meaning commonplace and uninteresting. We find examples of literary assessment on the part of the narrator in a number of episodes, including [Episodes 77](#) and [87](#). In this case, the comment may be tongue-in-cheek; it does not necessarily imply that the narrator regards the poem as mediocre at all. The narrator's final comment (*miko no hon'i nashi*) has been interpreted in a number of different ways, the most likely being that it is a criticism of Itaru's behaviour as being highly inappropriate in the context of the death of a princess. Another possible translation is: 'For Her Highness, it was surely disappointing.'

funeral: The word 'funeral' here is a translation of *hafuri*, from a verb meaning 'to discard (a dead body)' and, by extension, 'to bury'.

a lady in her carriage: *Onna-guruma* (literally, 'woman's carriage') was, as the name implies, one used by women and different in appearance from a man's carriage.

weeping profusely: See *otoko naki* (crying of men).

Shitago: See Appendix 2 ([here](#)) and the Introduction ([here](#)).

40

With All His Heart

This is one of several episodes about the passion of young love. Here, the parents of the hero stand in the way of his love for a low-ranking girl serving the family. Greatly distressed, the young man nearly dies but eventually regains his hold on life through the prayers of his parents.

The obscure final sentence by the narrator has inspired a variety of interpretations, none of which is definitive. Yamamoto and others argue that the phrases 'young of long ago' and 'old men these days' have been employed to highlight the differences in the depth of passion felt by people of old compared with those of the present, who cannot love as passionately. Katagiri, on the other hand, takes the last sentence to refer to one and the same person at different stages of his life. Thus interpreted, the sentence reads: 'That young man long ago loved with all his heart; this old man could never love like that now', and can be read as a first-person recollection by the narrator of an episode in his youth. Yet another possible interpretation is: 'The passionate young men of long ago who are now older can no longer love like they did.' I have opted for this interpretation, which is the most commonly accepted reading.

when the man was in his youth: I have added this to the beginning of the episode to make clear that the man being referred to here is the

same man, i.e. **Narihira**, as in other episodes.

tears of blood: See *chi no namida*.

eight at night: The time is given as the ‘hour of the dog’ (*inu no koku*), which is about two hours on each side of 8 p.m.

41

Purple Bonds

While this episode shares many elements with [Episode 1](#), it is thought that [Episode 41](#) was composed first, making it one of the earliest in the *Tales*. Both episodes employ famous poems, and both concern two sisters. Like [Episode 16](#), [Episode 41](#) depicts the hero as a paragon of kindness and *noblesse oblige*, which in turn became the model for Genji in *The Tale of Genji*. The hero helps the sister of his wife, who has married a poor and low-ranking man, partially out of his high regard for his own wife. The ‘formal wear’ mentioned here is the outer robe that had to be worn by court officials on ceremonial occasions. It had a different colour according to the rank of the wearer.

The sister tries to wash her husband’s robe herself in preparation for the New Year festivities, but rips it. When traditional Japanese clothes are washed, they are first unstitched, so that what is washed are long lengths of cloth, which are then starched and stretched out to dry in order not to get wrinkled. Here the sister has clearly stretched the fabric too far and ended up tearing it.

The poem illustrates how the hero’s deep love for his wife extends to her sister. It uses the puns (*kakekotoba*) *me* (meaning both ‘bud’ and ‘eye’) and *haru* (meaning ‘swell’ or ‘sprout’ and ‘far’). Thus the line *me mo haru ni* can mean both ‘the swelling buds’ and ‘as far as the eye can see’. As the narrator observes, the poem was composed in the same spirit as a poem in the *Kokinshū* (no. 867):

Because of a single stalk
of lavender grass,
I look with affection
on all the grasses
of the Musashi Plain.

(*Murasaki no / hitomoto yue ni / Musashino no / kusa wa minagara / aware to zo miru*)

The poem from this episode also appears in the *Kokinshū* (no. 868), immediately after the poem cited. There, the headnote states ‘On sending a robe to his brother-in-law’ and is thought to provide the source for the headnote in [Episode 41](#), where the story has been expanded to include the wife ruining the robe when washing it.

New Year’s Eve: See *lunisolar calendar*.

Plain of Musashi: See the commentary to [Episode 9](#); see also [Episode 12](#).

Episode 42 depicts the hero in a situation in which he cannot give up his love for a fickle lady despite the distress his suspicions about her fidelity are causing him. The hero's conflicted state of mind – loving the lady despite being unable to trust her – are well expressed in the repetition of the adverb *hata* (literally, 'but then'/'and also'; translated here as 'even though' and 'Despite') at the beginning of the tale. Unusually in a love affair, he openly declares his suspicions in his poem. The final comment by the narrator indicates that he understands that the man's suspicions would cause him to send such an unusual poem. This a good example of the many episodes in the *Tales* concerning the hero's misgivings about an unfaithful lady (*irogonomi* – see [here](#)).

an amorous lady: Some early commentaries on this work have argued that the lady referred to was the famous ninth-century poet Ono no Komachi (see [here](#)), a legendary lover in her own right, but such interpretations are no longer considered valid and are relevant only in terms of the history of the reception of the *Tales*.

43

Where the Cuckoo Sings

Episode 43 is one of the most charming of the entire work because of the humorous and generous attitude towards love affairs that it evokes. The hero concludes that, as long as the lady keeps visiting him, he will tolerate her visiting other men, a sentiment in keeping with polygamous Heian court society (see [here](#)). As in the previous episode, the hero is depicted as a devoted man who cannot bear to be apart from a lady despite her fickle ways (*irogonomi* – see [here](#)).

The first poem is also included in the *Kokinshū* (no. 147) as an anonymous poem on an unknown topic or *dai shirazu* (see [here](#)). In it, the hero compares the lady, who has many lovers, to a cuckoo that flies from place to place and complains how this hurts him greatly. Though the metaphor of the cuckoo was usually applied to men – who travelled to the homes of their lovers on their nightly visits – here it is deliberately used to refer to a lady.

In the second poem, the cuckoo is referred to by its alternate name, *shade no taosa* (tiller of the underworld). The origin of this name is obscure; in the Heian period it was simply used as a synonym for 'cuckoo', and that is how it has been translated. The word *iori* (translated here as 'huts') means a small hut used for supervising agricultural activities and is an associative word (*engo*) for *taosa*

(overseer of farm labourers). The phrase *iori amata* (many huts) is employed as a metaphor for having relationships with many men.

In the Japanese, the note between the second and third poems indicates that the exchange took place in the fifth month, which would have been in the summer according to the old **lunisolar calendar**. The cuckoo is a bird of summer, so the poems are appropriate to the season.

Whereas, in the first poem, the man uses the expression *nao utomarenu* ('how it pains me') in the third he says merely *nao tanomu* ('I love you still'), a considerable development from his former stance. He has been completely disarmed by the lady's cajolery.

a prince named Kaya: Prince Kaya appears in this episode as the lady's lover only at the beginning; he then disappears from the narrative, which develops with no direct connection to him.

44

Undo a Train

Another episode based on the theme of friendship, this has parallels with [Episode 16](#) in its depiction of the great kindness and sincerity that the hero shows towards a friend, here departing to take up an official post in the provinces. The poem composed by the hero in honour of his friend belongs to a genre known as *muma no hanamuke*, from an old farewell ritual involving the use of horses. Though, in the Japanese, the first sentence has no explicit subject, it refers to the man (the hero) who is hosting the party. Similarly, though not so designated, the subject of the second sentence, the person who 'had a servant serve him sake', is the man's wife. In normal circumstances, a lady would have been sitting behind a curtain or screen, as was the custom on such occasions, so the fact that she was in attendance at all means that the guest had close ties to both husband and wife. This is also hinted at by the phrase in the opening paragraph, 'As the friend was close to the family'.

The departing friend is given a set of women's robes as a farewell gift. It was the custom to do so even if the recipient was a man. The train (*mo*) was attached to the waist and fell behind the garment. It derived from a type of skirt worn by women in the eighth century and earlier. During the Heian period, from around the ninth century onwards, styles became more Japanese, as opposed to simply mimicking the previously influential Chinese fashion in customs and attire. Because women increasingly tended to assume a prone, rather than a standing, position, the 'skirt' changed into a long train that extended from the rear of the garment. The train was attached to

ceremonial dress only on formal occasions. In poetry, *mo* is a homophone meaning both ‘the train of the garment’ and ‘misfortune’.

The man composes the poem on behalf of his wife (see *daisaku* (*proxy composition*)) but we can only tell this because it is implied in the voice of the poem itself, spoken as a lady removing her train. Although in the poem the wife claims to have taken off her own train to give to her husband’s friend, in actuality what was presented would almost certainly have been a new one.

45

Fireflies, Please Tell the Wild Geese

Though on the surface *Episode 45* concerns the death of a young lady, perhaps the real significance of the episode is, as Katagiri argues, that it is a part of the expanding portrait of the hero, **Narihira**, whose kindness extends to expressing sadness for a girl whom he has never even met but who dies because of her love for him. While the story may appear vague to a non-Japanese audience, it has traditionally been a favourite in Japan.

Unable to disclose her feelings even to her parents, the well-brought-up girl falls ill and says nothing until she is near death. After the hero is told, he panics and hurries to her house. But it is too late and, in mourning, the hero composes two poems. The first is subject to a number of interpretations. One suggests that a firefly is the spirit of a dead person. Another sees the poem as a plea to the girl’s spirit, here likened to a wild goose, to return on the autumn breezes. Included in collections such as the *Gosenshū* simply as an autumn poem, the poem is thought to have had no connection originally with the story of the girl.

The second poem, unusually following on the first poem without a headnote, expresses the poet’s sense of futility at the loss of the young girl. Of this tale Hori Tatsuo writes: ‘When I read such an episode, I am filled suddenly with something that indefinably clutches at my heart, something sorrowful, like a requiem ... In it can clearly be heard the involuntary sigh of a heedless man.’

the man shut himself away: Because of taboos related to death pollution, after the death of the girl, the hero is unable to leave the house. Katagiri points out in his commentary on the episode that the *Rinjisaishiki* (Special Festivals) section of the *Engishiki* (Laws of the Engi Era; 927) stated that it was forbidden to go to court for thirty days after a death. Because the hero may have had direct contact with the girl, he would have been subject to this rule.

the last day of summer ... he played music: The text gives the time as

the end of the sixth month of the **lunisolar calendar**, which would be the last days of summer. The playing of music would have been not only to relieve the hero's own tedium during his period of isolation but also to console the spirit of the dead girl.

46

A Special Friend

This episode centres on the hero's reply by poem to a letter he has received from a close friend who had left the capital for the provinces. Countering the reproach made by his friend that 'it is quite natural to forget someone whom one never sees', the hero's poem revolves around the words that appear in the letter. Here *omokage* (literally, 'vision' or 'phantom') is translated as 'image' – that of the friend constantly present in spirit even if not in person (see also commentary to [Episode 63](#)).

It is not unusual in the *Tales* to find men exchanging poems as if they were lovers. [Episodes 11](#), [16](#), [38](#), [44](#) and [48](#) are other examples. (For more on the theme of friendship, see [here](#) and **poetic exchanges between men**.)

47

A Sacred Wand

[Episode 47](#) features a witty exchange of poems between a lady whom the hero desperately wants to meet but who believes him to be a philanderer (*ada*) and therefore behaves ever more coldly towards him.

Both poems are based on the image of a sacred streamer (*Ōnusa*) – a wooden wand with strips of paper, linen or cotton attached that was and still is used in Shinto purification rituals. People would rub parts of their bodies on the streamer, transferring any 'pollution' to the strips of paper. The wand was then thrown into a river, carrying away any impurities with it. In the first poem, the hero is compared to the streamer when it is being pulled by 'many hands', to illustrate his philandering ways. The second poem extends the metaphor, when the wand settles in one place on the river, to assure the lady that the hero will eventually devote himself to her alone.

Both poems appear in the *Kokinshū* (nos. 706 and 707) as an exchange between **Narihira** and an anonymous lady, and it is thought that this episode of the *Tales* was adapted from that work. Like [Episode 39](#), this is one of the few episodes in which the man, rather than the woman, exemplifies the concept of *irogonomi* (see [here](#)).

The One Who Waits

Like [Episode 44](#), this episode offers another example of the farewell poem (*muma no hanamuke*). Here the hero organizes a farewell party for someone who does not turn up, and the poem is written as though the two were a man and a woman in love. The words *hito matamu / sato* (translated here as ‘the one who waits for me’) conjure up a situation in which a woman is waiting for a man. In its evocation of the agony of waiting, the poem is very similar in sentiment to the one in [Episode 38](#). (See also **poetic exchanges between men**.)

This poem is included in the *Kokinshū* (no. 969) as a poem by **Narihira**, with a headnote explaining that it was composed when a man called Ki no Toshisada was setting out for Awa Province – part of present-day Tokushima Prefecture – to take up a post in the provincial bureaucracy. It is very probable that this episode, like [Episode 47](#), was adapted from the *Kokinshū*.

New Grass of Spring

[Episode 49](#) is striking for its depiction of incestuous feelings on the part of the hero towards his sister. It is important to keep in mind, however, that such sentiments would not have been as shocking as they are today, because marriage between half-brothers and -sisters appears to have occurred in Japan up until the beginning of the ninth century. Commentators have debated whether the girl was the man’s full or half-sister. The latter is more likely, however, as there is no evidence that the historical **Narihira** had sisters.

This episode was used by Murasaki Shikibu in [Chapter 47](#) in *The Tale of Genji*, in which Prince Niou shows an illustration of the episode to his full sister, the First Princess (Oigimi), to see her reaction. She, however, finds his teasing offensive and does not reply. This suggests that illustrated versions of the *Tales* may have been circulating by the time the *Tale of Genji* was written (c.1008).

In the first poem, the brother expresses his feelings to his sister. The word *wakakusa* (translated here as ‘New Grass of Spring’) was a common metaphor for a young person. On its own, *ura* in *Urawakami* (‘young and pretty’) means ‘tip’ or ‘shoot’ (i.e. the youngest part of a plant). In *neyoge* (‘I would like to lie with you’; literally, ‘to appear good to sleep with’), *ne* is a homophone meaning both ‘sleep’ and ‘root’. *Ura* (tip), *ne* (root) and *musubu* (to knot) are associative words (**engo**) linked to *kusa* (grass). *Kusa o musubu* is a standard phrase in Japanese, literally meaning to ‘tie grass’ but also used as an image for

pledging love, praying for long life, etc. *Hito no musuban* (the future tense of *musubu*) in the poem means ‘to be married to someone else’, translated here as ‘that you will be someone else’s’.

The reply expresses both the sister’s surprise at receiving an erotic poem from her brother and a rebuke. The word *mezurashiki* (rare, lovely) is a pillow word (***makura kotoba***) for *Hatsukusa* (first grass); *koto no ha* (what you say) is synonymous with ‘words’ (*kotoba*), referring in particular to words used in a poem. Here, it also serves as an associative word for *Hatsukusa*. The phrase ***koto no ha*** (literally, ‘leaves of your words’, based on *ha* meaning ‘leaf’) is commonly used in classical poetry.

50

Lovers’ Quarrel

Episode 50 features a rather acrimonious exchange of poems between the hero and a lady, each accusing the other of infidelity. But the acrimony is alleviated by the playful nature of the episode, including the incorporation of a Chinese proverb and various Buddhist ideas, which would have given it great appeal to the sophisticated readers of the time.

In the first poem, the metaphor of eggs piled on top of one another derives from a Chinese proverb, ‘more hazardous than a pile of eggs’. The impossibility of the task is emphasized by the sheer number of eggs, with ‘hundred’ being expressed in the original as ten times ten (*tō zutsu tō*). The second poem, given in reply, refers to dew (*tsuyu* in *Asatsuya*) to signify something fleeting, reinforced by *kono yo* (evanescent and unreliable). From its basic meaning of ‘society in general’ or ‘human relations’, it can also be interpreted as referring to relations between a man and a woman.

The theme of transience continues in the third poem with the reference to cherry blossoms. Cherry blossoms, which are soon scattered, were widely used in ***waka*** to represent impermanence; much the same metaphor is used, for example, in **Episodes 17** and **90**. In the fourth poem, the woman tries to outdo the man with yet another image for the ephemeral: ‘writing numbers / on flowing water’ (*Yuku mizu ni / kazu kaku*). The expression ‘like writing on water’ (derived from the *Nirvana Sutra*, where it is a symbol of the evanescent nature of life) appeared in Japan as early as the ***Man’yōshū*** in the form ‘like writing numbers on water’ – probably relating to the way (still common in Japan) of recording numbers by drawing lines. This poem is thought to have been taken from the ***Kokinshū***, where it appears as no. 522.

The fifth poem effectively ends the quarrel by drawing together the

various images from the other four – ‘flowing waters’, ‘scattering blossoms’ and ‘passing years’ – into a lament about impermanence. Using images from nature to convey the impermanence of a love affair was common in classical Japanese poetry.

In his final comment, the narrator casts an ironic eye on the whole affair: the hero and the lady have simply been competing in a battle of wits when they are probably both involved with multiple partners.

51

Deep Roots

Episode 51 features a simple poem composed upon the planting of chrysanthemums. In China, the chrysanthemum was associated with the realm of the immortals and therefore had the image of perpetual youth and longevity, associations that were carried over with the flower when it was brought to Japan in the Heian period. The chrysanthemum does not appear at all, for example, in the earlier collection, the *Man'yōshū*. In this good-fortune poem, the poet prays for the health and prosperity of the recipient.

The poem appears also in the *Yamato monogatari* (no. 163), in which the ‘someone’ in the episode is said to be the **Empress of the Second Avenue**. In the *Tales*, however, the recipient remains unidentified. The same poem is also found in the *Kokinshū* (no. 268), with the following headnote: ‘Attached to some chrysanthemums, for someone to plant in his garden. By Ariwara no Narihira.’ Thus **Narihira** is identified as the author of the poem.

garden: The word *senzai*, translated here as ‘garden’, refers specifically to plants, such as shrubs and flowers, grown in the front garden that could be enjoyed from close proximity. In the Heian period, the term referred in particular to autumn plants like chrysanthemums, bush clover and pampas grass.

52

Sweet Flags and Pheasants

One of the problems of **Episode 52** is that the poem and the prose refer to two different gifts. The poem is sent, together with a pheasant, in thanks for the gift of rice cakes. However, the poem does not mention the cakes and refers instead only to the flowers (‘sweet flags’); both the cakes and the sweet flags are associated with Tango no Sekku, the festival of the fifth day of the fifth month, known today in Japan as Children’s Day. It is highly likely that the rice cakes were wrapped in sweet-flag leaves, and that is how I would suggest the

reader interprets this tale, but it is not clearly stated in the text, so there appears to be a discrepancy.

The poem compares the difficulties encountered by the friend, in procuring sweet flags, with those of the hero, in hunting pheasants. It was a convention in poetry at the time to exaggerate the trouble to which a person had gone in order to acquire the gift that was being presented. Here, the hero is both thanking the friend for his trouble and reminding him of his own. It is not known why he gave a pheasant as a return gift; hunting does not fit seasonally, since it was generally a winter activity. My guess is that the pheasant was chosen because it allowed the poet to make a pun on the verb 'to hunt' with the verb 'to cut grass' (or, in this case, flowers), as both are pronounced *karu* in Japanese. Thus the verb *karu* acts as a pun (*kakekotoba*) in the form of a homophone that links the two parts of the poem. The hero does not think that his friend has actually gone out and gathered the sweet flags, and he is simply teasing him that just as his friend went out to cut grass, he has also hunted in the fields. Similar examples of gifts being used to enhance poetic expression can be found in [Episode 3](#) and elsewhere.

The poem itself is one of the more cryptic in the *Tales* and has generated many interpretations; my translation here is based on the standard interpretation.

beautifully wrapped rice cakes: The rice cakes, made from washed glutinous rice, would have been wrapped and decorated with multicoloured silk thread. Nowadays, these cakes are wrapped in broad bamboo grass leaves, tied with string and steamed.

sweet flags: The sweet flag has tiny flowers and its leaves, which have a strong fragrance, were hung from the roof to ward off malign forces.

[Episode 53](#) can be read in two different ways, depending on how one interprets *monogatari nado suru* (translated here as 'talking'; see *monogataraui*), which can mean either small talk or pillow talk following sex. If the phrase is taken to mean only 'talking', then the two did not have sex. In such an interpretation, the hero, having finally met the woman he has been trying to meet for some time, then suddenly realizes that they have spent the whole night simply talking.

Common sense suggests that for a lover as ardent as **Narihira** an entire night of conversation is a little hard to believe. Yamamoto thus argues that they probably did have sex. By contrast, Katagiri sees this

episode as a variation on [Episode 2](#), in which the hero only talks to the lady he desires without enjoying physical relations with her. He argues that the verb *monogatari*su, which appears here and in [Episodes 82](#) and [95](#), always only means ‘talking’. Equally, the ambiguity – the fact that the word may be interpreted in different ways – could be intentional.

the cock crowed: See **crowing of the cock**.

my heart ... is still deep within the night: Depending on how one interprets *monogatari nado suru* (see above), this suggests either that the lovemaking between the hero and the lady has been so passionate that he wishes it would go on longer or that he is feeling frustrated because they did not consummate their love.

54

The Path of Dreams

[Episode 54](#) features a lovely poem in which the hero complains to a lady of his inability to see her even in his dreams because of her indifference towards him. The ‘path of dreams’ (*yumeji*) traditionally leads to the home of one’s beloved. In Heian romance, if a man is unable to reach a lady even in his dreams, it means that she is not thinking of him. The hero weeps because he knows that he can never attain the lady’s love no matter how hard he tries; the dew (*tsuyu*) on his sleeves represents the tears of grief that he sheds because of this.

The first time that the word *yumeji* was used in classical Japanese poetry was in two beautiful poems by Ono no Komachi (see [here](#)) in the *Kokinshū* (nos. 657 and 658):

Filled with love
the night comes on.
But if we only meet in dreams
and not reality,
no one can fault our love.

(*Kagirinaki / omoi no mama ni / yoru mo komu / yumeji o saeni / hito ha togameji*)

I visit you always
in my dreams
but in reality
I have yet to know the joy
of meeting you once.

(*Yumeji ni ha / ashi mo yasumezu / kayoedomo / utsutsu ni hitome / mishigoto wa arazu*)

In this relatively straightforward episode, the hero sends a poem to a lady with whom he has fallen in love. The lady replies to his poems occasionally – implied by ‘but each time I recall / the things you said’ – but he still hopes that she may return his feelings. The poem employs the frequently used expression **koto no ha** (leaves of words), translated here as ‘the things you said’.

56

An Inn of Dew

[Episode 56](#) features a poem by the once again love-stricken hero. The ‘hut thatched with grass’ derives from a Chinese expression often used in poetry to describe the dwelling of a hermit or recluse. The rough thatch, with its many openings, allows the evening dew (*tsuyu*) to enter the hut. The dew is likened to tears, and the hut to a sleeve saturated with tears of love. As Katagiri points out, this episode has some linguistic similarities with [Episode 4](#), which is also similar in the circumstances described. Together, these episodes add complexity to the portrayal of the hero, depicting the setbacks of a man for whom love plays a central role in his life. See also the poems in [Episodes 26](#) and [54](#).

57

The Skeleton Shrimp

The poem in [Episode 57](#) is based on the word ‘skeleton shrimp’ (*warekara*), which is a pun that also functions as a pivot word (see **kakekotoba**). A more direct translation of the Japanese would be ‘shell-splitting shrimp’, referring to how the shrimp periodically sheds its shell; it is a small arthropod (*Caprella mutica*) that lives hidden in seaweed and can change colour to match its immediate surroundings. The image was commonly employed in poetry because when written as two separate words (*ware kara*) it could mean ‘by one’s own volition’ or ‘from myself’, and so could be used – as it is here – to indicate that one had brought troubles of the heart upon oneself. (See also [Episode 65](#).)

The second and third lines of the poem, *ama no karumo ni / yadoru chō*, form a preface (**jokotoba**) for *ware kara*. And the poem provides a good example of how the preface and pivot word work together. In the Japanese, *ama no karumo ni / yadoru chō / ware kara* can be read literally as ‘the seaweed that the fisherfolk cut / in this lives / the skeleton shrimp’. These words have nothing to do with the poet’s

deeper message, however, simply serving as clever verbal decoration, like a verbal bouquet of flowers enclosed with a message of love. They are translated here as: 'Just as the skeleton shrimp / sheds its brittle shell'.

As indicated above, *ware kara*, rendered as two separate words, carries the meaning 'by one's own volition', and this forms the basis of the poet's underlying message: 'I, too, break into pieces / with torments of a love / that I brought on myself'. *Ware kara* thus acts as a pivot word that enables the poem to be read in two entirely different ways, making it much more profound than a simple pun. Indeed, the second, purely decorative, sense conveyed by the poem can be read meaningfully up to the last line:

The torments of love—
the skeleton shrimp
that lives in the seaweed
cut by the fisherfolk
sheds its brittle shell.

This is not the only reading, of course, but just one layer of the ingenious verbal play.

The poem well reflects the behavioural code of the time in that the hero does not blame his beloved for the intensity of his feelings, but admits he brought the 'torments of ... love' upon himself. It has been argued convincingly that [Episodes 2, 4 and 5](#) form an important subsection of the *Tales* in their depictions of an unobtainable lady. These three episodes are echoed in [Episodes 51–7](#) in their compact narrative style and oblique references to the lady.

58

Demons and Gleanings

[Episode 58](#) has long been recognized as one of the most humorous in the *Tales*. Poems are exchanged between the hero, who has built himself a country home in Nagaoka (see [Map 3](#)), and the ladies-in-waiting of a princess living next door. Nagaoka, near Heiankyo (Kyoto), was the capital between 784 and 794, and many members of the imperial family and court nobility had residences there. We are told in [Episode 84](#) that **Narihira's** mother, **Princess Ito**, lived here, but it is not clear whether this has any connection to the present episode. The location seems to have been a peaceful rural area, and the poems employ images of fields and rice harvesting.

The first poem is by one of the ladies. Seeing the man retreat into an inner room of his house, she asks whether it is deserted. This poem appears in the *Kokinshū* (no. 984) as a nostalgic evocation of an actual deserted and ruined dwelling; here, however, it has been turned

into a playful quip. In the Japanese, the narrative following the first poem refers to the hero's residence as a palace, which has caused problems for commentators, as this would imply that the hero was an imperial prince, a point that is still debated today. Because of this, the translation refers to the house only as a 'residence'.

The second poem develops the conceit of a ruined house with the hero poking fun at the ladies, likening their unorthodox visit to a 'gathering' of 'demons'. The ladies respond by offering to glean the rice fields. Picking up the fallen grains that remained on the ground after the harvest was by law a prerogative of the poor and needy. Female attendants of a high-ranking household would not have been allowed to do this work, so by offering to glean, the ladies are feigning humility. In the third poem, the hero shows that he sees through their ploy all too easily.

a man of refined taste and knowledgeable in affairs of the heart: The expression *kokoro tsukite* has been interpreted in various ways, but it is best understood in the sense of 'elegant', 'artistic', 'romantic', 'refined' or 'tasteful'. This is one of the few episodes (nos. 39 and 47 are other examples) where a man, as opposed to a woman, is described as a 'gallant' (*irogonomi* – see [here](#); translated here as 'knowledgeable in affairs of the heart'), though in this specific episode he is not involved in any passionate relationship.

an imperial family member: The word in the Japanese (*miyabara*) means a person whose mother was a princess.

what a tasteful occupation for such an elegant gentleman: The subject of 'setting off to oversee the rice harvesting' is the hero, which is not obvious in the original Japanese. Seeing him leave the house, the ladies call him a *sukimono*. Applicable to someone engaged in something unconnected with either profit or duty, this can refer to either a 'gallant' (*irogonomi*) or a refined person. Here, the ladies use it to poke fun at a nobleman going out to the fields, which was considered inelegant.

Crossing the Straits of the Milky Way

Episode 59 depicts a man who very nearly dies but is comically revived when water is splashed on his face. It was widely believed at the time that a person could return from the dead, as **Episode 40** also suggests.

We do not know exactly why the man resolves to leave the capital and live at Higashiyama, a mountain to the east of the city, but knowing our hero, we may reasonably assume that it is because of

some trouble with a woman. Though it is now a beautiful historic district in east Kyoto, at the time the *Tales* was written, Higashiyama was also the name of a hamlet on the mountain.

The first poem reveals the hero's intention to lead a secluded life in the countryside because living in the city has become unbearable. The second poem, which appears in the *Kokinshū* (no. 863), is clearly associated with the [Tanabata legend](#). The poem here amusingly recasts the tale in having the hero state that the water that revives him might be from the Milky Way, suggesting both that he can meet the lady only rarely, like the two lovers in the legend, and that the time has come to meet her because he feels the splash of the water on his face. There is also, of course, an implication that his plan to leave the capital was due to his inability to meet his beloved, and this is supported by the narrator's quip at the end of the episode.

Other witty adaptations of the Tanabata legend appear in [Episodes 82](#) and [95](#), demonstrating how skilfully pre-existing literary material has been incorporated into the *Tales*.

60

Mandarin Blossom

[Episode 60](#) is one of several episodes that deal with the theme of separation and its adverse effect on relationships; see also [Episodes 24](#) and [62](#). The hero presents a poem to his former wife, who had left him for another man, when he meets her again at the residence of her new husband. He wishes to see her, not out of ill will but sheer nostalgia, and the poem he recites reflects this. However, from the lady's point of view, his kindness leaves her no recourse. The suffering of the lady in this episode is reminiscent of that of her counterpart in [Episode 24](#).

The poem appears in the *Kokinshū* (no. 139) and is used here without alteration. This episode and the next (no. 61) depict a 'journey to the west', in contrast to the more famous journey to the east in the early sections of the *Tales*.

sent to the Usa Shrine as an imperial envoy: The imperial envoy to Usa (*Usa no tsukai*) was an official sent from the court to the Usa Shrine (now Usa Hachimangu, Usa, Oita Prefecture; see [Map 1](#)) to report new accessions and other important events. The lady's new husband is the provincial official in charge of receiving and entertaining the imperial envoy.

the sake cup: The cup referred to here is called a *kawarake*. Made of unglazed pottery, it was used at banquets and usually shattered afterwards so that it could not be used again. Because asking his

former wife to serve the sake was the order of an imperial envoy, the provincial official was not in a position to refuse.

mandarin orange: A mandarin (*tachibana*) is added to the narrative to provide the cue for the composition of a poem on its fragrance. In the poem, *satsuki* is the fifth month of the **lunisolar calendar**, when mandarin blossoms are in bloom.

61

The Colour of Love

The poems in [Episode 61](#) employ local place names and multiple puns that pose considerable challenges for the translator. The exchange takes place on a visit to Tsukushi in modern-day Kyushu, and the setting encourages us to see this episode in tandem with [Episode 60](#), also set there as part of a ‘journey to the west’.

The lady is behind a screen used to hide women from male visitors. No one could see inside the screened-off area, but as the screen was made from thin slats of bamboo it was easy to see outside from the darker interior. The lady may have been the wife of the person whose house the hero was visiting.

The first poem plays skilfully on the name Somegawa (literally, ‘River of Dyes’), the name of a river (see [Map 1](#)) located in present-day Fukuoka Prefecture, and the word *iro*, which means both ‘colour’ and ‘(erotic) love’. In reply to the lady’s accusation that the hero is a gallant (i.e. someone who likes *iro* or, in this context, sex; see [here](#) for more on the key term *irogonomi*), he asserts that anyone who crosses the River of Dyes is inevitably stained with ‘colour’ (*iro*), hence he is not the only one who is fond of affairs. In other words, he implies that the lady is also guilty of the same offence. The same poem appears in the *Shūishū* (no. 1234), where it is attributed to **Narihira**.

In her reply, the lady refers to Tawarejima (Wanton Island – see [Map 1](#)), a reef off the coast of Kyushu whose name is derived from the verb *tawabureru*, meaning ‘to play around’ or ‘to flirt’. In general, *nureginu* (drenched robes) signifies a false accusation. The phrase *nami no nureginu* plays on the maritime theme with its dual sense of drenched by waves and a groundless rumour, translated here as ‘it’s unfair to say’. The precise meaning of the poem is open to interpretation. Some commentators argue that the lady is asserting that there is no basis in fact that people ‘who cross / the River of Dyes’ all develop a penchant for love affairs: only the hero is a gallant. Another interpretation – the one I have followed here – is that just as Wanton Island is not true to its name, so it is false to charge the lady with being wanton in love. A similar poem appears in the *Gosenshū* (no. 1351), and the present poem is probably a reworking of it.

Bare Branches

Like [Episode 60](#), [Episode 62](#) depicts a woman leaving her husband and her chance reunion with him in the provinces. Because he neglected her for many years, she ended up in someone's service and went to live far from the capital, and such behaviour is seen by the narrator as a mark of her lack of intelligence. Recognizing the lady as his former wife, the hero uses his position as a high-ranking court nobleman on official government business to ask for her to be sent to him for the night.

The first poem expresses the hero's surprise at the lady's present miserable state, likening her to denuded cherry blossoms and describing her lost beauty as branches stripped bare. There are countless poems on cherry blossoms in Japanese classical literature, as it was the symbol of beauty, and hence a beautiful woman.

The second poem asks if this can truly be how things have turned out. In this episode, the more the hero expresses his feelings of sadness, the more remorseful the lady becomes, in contrast to [Episode 60](#). Taking off one's cloak to present it as a gift was common at the time, as we can also see in [Episodes 16](#) and [44](#).

Love at a Hundred

[Episode 63](#) is a tale of love between the hero and a lady of advanced years. The events that unfold are highly implausible, and the episode is designed to humorously exaggerate the figure of the hero as superior to ordinary lovers.

A lady who appears to be quite old but nevertheless longs for a lover seeks the advice of her sons. Through a dream that she pretends to have had, she expresses to her three sons her desire to meet a kind man who would be her lover. By describing the dream to others, she invites them to divine and explain the prophetic elements within it. In Heian times, dreams were thought to have a mystical meaning, sent by deities either as divine messages (*otsuge*) or as predictions of the future. The two eldest sons do not react to the woman's fabrication, but the youngest one arranges for her to meet the hero.

This is the only episode in the *Tales* in which the hero is referred to as *Zaigo chūjō* (literally, 'the fifth Ariwara son/captain'), but in the translation he is given his real name, Ariwara no **Narihira**. Katagiri points out that this naming is based on an already established image of the hero. The youngest son believes that only Narihira would have the generosity of heart to accept the plea of his ageing mother, and so

he waits for Narihira to pass by while he is out hawking and implores him to meet her. Moved by the request, Narihira visits the lady's house and spends the night there, though it is not clear whether he does so out of pity for her or because he is touched by the son's filial concern.

When the hero does not return, the lady goes to his house to try to catch a glimpse of him. As it was usually men who did the 'glimpsing' (*kaimami*), such behaviour by an old woman seems both strange and ludicrous, and this scene can be seen as a kind of parody of what was a common trope in the fiction of the period (see also [here](#) and [Episodes 1](#) and [23](#)).

The hero's poem describes the lady as being 'just a year shy of a century' (*Momotose ni / hitotose taranu*), although she was probably only in her forties. The word 'phantom' (*omokage*) as used in the Japanese, refers to an image of someone appearing before one's eyes like an apparition. The expression is employed humorously here because the hero is pretending that he has not actually seen the lady lurking in the garden, only an image of her. For more on the belief that a person thinking of the loved one would appear in his or her dreams or as a phantom image, see [Episode 9](#) and the 'path of dreams' (*yumeji*) in [Episode 54](#), and [Episodes 21](#) and [46](#) for poems that use the word *omokage*.

Hearing the poem and seeing the hero preparing to go out, the lady imagines that he must be about to visit her. She rushes home and lies down. Making sure the hero can hear her, she recites a poem. Thus they each put on an act for the other, but whereas the hero is aware of the lady's actions, the lady does not realize that the hero knows that she has visited his house. The words 'robe for one' (*koromo katashiki*) in the woman's poem refer to the custom of spreading out the robes of both partners when the two sleep together, but only the sleeve of one's own robe when sleeping alone. This expression was used in poetry since ancient times as a metaphor for loneliness. The woman's poem is a reworking of one in the *Kokinshū* (no. 689). The story of Prince Genji and the 'elderly lady' Gen no Naishi no Suke in *The Tale of Genji* is thought to have been modelled upon this episode.

The final exaggerated comment by the narrator tells of the hero's unique compassion as a lover, but it is clearly meant to be humorous. Among the English translations of the *Tales* available, I was inspired by Helen McCullough's, particularly her beautiful translations of the prose sections, which are very much in keeping with the elegance of the original. As a tribute to her, I have used verbatim her translation of the last sentence of [Episode 63](#), which, though not a direct translation, is perfect: 'But Narihira made no such fine distinctions.'

Becoming a Breeze

[Episode 64](#) is a fairly straightforward depiction of an exchange between the hero and a lady. The fact that he does not know where she lives suggests that she must be of very high rank at court, making it extremely difficult to gain access to her. In his poem, the man fantasizes about becoming a breeze that could enter her rooms through the slats of the blinds. A man only entered a lady's room when he was going to have intimate relations with her. The lady's reply is a refusal, its haughtiness another indication of her high rank: she's so grand, her poem implies, that even the breeze cannot disturb her without permission. The words 'he had someone who knew her whereabouts' were added to the translation, as he could not have delivered the poem otherwise.

The Young Love of Narihira

The *Tales* places the hero in many different situations, all of which are meant to enhance the reader's image of him as an ideal lover. [Episode 63](#) pairs the experienced hero with an old woman whereas [Episode 65](#) is a depiction of the passion of the young hero; [Episodes 1](#) and [40](#) also give accounts of youthful love. The reference to a 'very young man from the Ariwara family [who] was serving in the Privy Chamber of the palace' leaves no doubt that the man in question was **Narihira**. This tale, thought to depict the hero's love for Takaiko, the **Empress of the Second Avenue**, is one of the longest in the *Tales*. Unlike in [Episodes 3](#), [4](#), [5](#) and [6](#), the lady here has already entered the palace as an **imperial consort**, and the young man is conducting an illicit liaison with her. The story of Prince Genji and his father's young wife, Fujitsubo (i.e. Genji's stepmother), at the beginning of *The Tale of Genji* is thought to be based on this account.

At the time of the tale, the adolescent sons of the nobility who had yet to celebrate their coming of age served as pages inside the palace in a kind of courtier apprenticeship. Narihira, the young man in this tale, was probably one of them. Because of their youth, pages had free access to the inner quarters of the palace where the women resided.

When the lady chastises him, he recites his first poem, a passionate statement of his love. Then when the lady retires to her private quarters, the young man follows her there. At a loss, the lady returns to her parental home, but still he pursues her. The next morning, he returns to his service in the Privy Chamber, after throwing his shoes deep inside the room where footwear was kept. By doing so, he tries

to create the impression that he has been on night-watch duty in the palace all the time, as latecomers would leave their shoes near the entrance. However, people already know of his escapades and laugh at his antics.

Eventually, the young man realizes that his behaviour could ruin his life and so appeals to the ‘buddhas and the gods’ to rid him of his feelings for the lady. He summons yin-yang diviners and female shamans and has a purification ritual performed on the banks of a river. The diviners were employees of the Bureau of Divination who specialized in astronomical observations, calendar-making and divination. The shamans were ritualists who served the native deities, what today are called *miko*, that is, young women who work as shrine attendants. However, the purification has no effect, and his love for the lady grows ever greater.

The second poem laments that the gods have not answered his prayer to rid him of his love. The ‘cleansing waters’ refer to the river where the purification ritual was performed. During the Heian period most people tended to use the Kamo River (see [Map 3](#)) for such rites, which was often referred to as the River of Purification (*mitarashigawa*). A poem with almost identical wording is found in the *Kokinshū* (no. 501). Both versions of the poem mention the ‘rites of purification’; it is the narrative in the *Tales* version that supplies the details of diviners and specialists actually being summoned. Such an unlikely story of rituals being performed to fall out of love would have amused readers.

Eventually, the emperor learns of the liaison and exiles the young man. The lady is punished and confined inside a storehouse belonging to the emperor’s mother in a rather melodramatic scene, of which there are several in the *Tales*. In the third poem, the lady blames herself for what has happened: the first two lines of the poem (translated as ‘a skeleton shrimp / in seaweed gathered by fisherfolk’) act as a preface (*jokotaba*) for *ware kara* (my own fault), punning on *warekara* (skeleton shrimp). The poem in [Episode 57](#) makes use of the same image. The succeeding poems relate the sad situation of the separated lovers; the fifth, in which the hero sings of his love, also appears in the *Kokinshū* (no. 620) and is included without change here.

Empress Mother: The mother of the emperor is referred to here by the title *Ōmiasundokoro* (literally, ‘great resting place’). At the end of the episode, she is identified as either the **Somedono Empress** or the **Empress of the Fifth Avenue**.

forbidden colours: These refer to colours that only people of special rank, or those with permission to do so, could wear. Since the lady

was a favourite of the emperor, she would have been allowed to wear deep red and purple.

Privy Chamber of the palace: A chamber of the Seiryoden, the emperor's living quarters within the imperial palace.

Mizunoo Emperor: In the original text, the narrator refers to the Emperor Seiwa by his posthumous name, Mizunoo, which derives from the location of his mausoleum, in the north-western part of Kyoto. It was customary to avoid mentioning the actual names of emperors and members of the high nobility. As a result, they were often referred to by the name of the place where they lived or had been buried. The Somedono Empress and the Empress of the Fifth Avenue are other examples.

66

The Sea of Life

Episodes 66, 67 and 68 are all set along the shores of Osaka Bay (see Map 2), and feature beautiful poems on the local scenery. The province of Settsu includes the present-day Osaka City and Hyogo Prefecture. Naniwa includes the present-day cities of Osaka and Amagasaki. Narihira is accompanied by his brothers and some friends to Naniwa, where, watching the ships, he composes a poem. The poem uses the puns (*kakekotoba*) *mitsu* ('saw' and 'Mitsu Harbour') and *umi wataru* ('crossing the sea' and 'sorrow-filled') to link ship-watching with weariness of life. Though it was customary on such occasions for the others present to compose poems themselves, the final sentence relates that they thought the poem so excellent that they declined to compose poems and simply return home. Similar accounts are found in Episodes 68 and 87, among others.

Katagiri has put forward an interesting theory according to which the poems in this and the following two episodes are linked by images that convey the hero's loneliness and melancholy. Here, the 'sea of life' is 'sorrow-filled' (*umi wataru*); in Episode 67, the clouds either do not wish to share the 'woods in snow blossom', described as sad (*ushi*) in the Japanese, or think the very act of sharing would be sad; and in Episode 68, 'but by the sea in spring' can be interpreted as a pun on 'spring sadness'. Sumiyoshi is thus a place for feelings of loss and despair to be healed. Though not all will agree with Katagiri, his interpretation is very much in keeping with the spirit of the *Tales*, which places such importance on wordplay.

67

Snow Blossom

On his way to the province of Izumi, the hero sees Mount Ikoma in the province of Kawachi (see [Map 2](#)) and composes a poem comparing the snow that covers the woods to blossoms. As in the previous and following episodes, Narihira is accompanied by trusted friends and again only he recites a poem; his friends decline to compose their own poems in deference to the hero's splendid one. The poem, in describing one thing in terms of another, provides an example of *mitate* (elegant confusion), though the term itself was not coined until the Edo period (1603–1868).

mid spring: A reference to the second month of the **lunisolar calendar**.

an outing: The word 'outing' (*shōyō*) implies rambling, far from the concerns of the everyday world.

the billowing clouds / hid this sight from view: In the poem, the grammatical subject of 'hid' (*kakrou*) is difficult to understand. Some argue that it is Mount Ikoma that hides the view, but according to Yamamoto, it is in fact clouds that hide the mountain, and this is the way I have translated it.

68

The Place to Dwell

Episode 68 features an exquisite poem that plays on the place name 'Sumiyoshi'. The ancient district of Sumiyoshi, where the Sumiyoshi Shrine is located (see [Map 2](#)), is roughly equivalent to the present-day Sumiyoshi Ward in Osaka city. The hero presumably stops there on his way to Izumi, described in [Episode 67](#). The word 'Sumiyoshi' is repeated three times in the short introductory passage (*Sumiyoshi no kōri, Sumiyoshi no sato, Sumiyoshi no hama*), as if to reinforce the sentiment of the poem that Sumiyoshi 'is the place to dwell'. (In the Japanese, each phrase includes *no*, followed by a disyllabic word, adding to the rhythmic effect.) The rest of the episode describes the hero admiring the scene.

The poem focuses on the Sumiyoshi shore and compares its beauty in spring and autumn. The 'wild geese' and the 'chrysanthemums' in the first two lines exemplify autumn. The place name 'Sumiyoshi' is a pun (*kakekotoba*) on *sumi yoshi* (a nice place to dwell). It was unconventional to begin a spring poem with autumnal motifs, and the choice would have pleasantly surprised the listeners. (For Katagiri's interpretation of the themes in this poem, see the commentary to [Episode 66](#).) As in the two preceding episodes, the other travellers are so moved by the poem that they decline to compose their own.

Was It Real, or Just a Dream?

[Episode 69](#) is deservedly one of the most famous and loved of the *Tales* and a possible source for the title *The Tales of Ise* (see below).

The hero travels to Ise as an imperial huntsman. There, he falls in love with the **Priestess of Ise** – also known, after her place of residence, as the *saigū* (literally, ‘abstinence palace’) – and spends a single night with her. Imperial huntsmen were dispatched around the country at the emperor’s command to hunt birds and other game to be served at banquets. Hawking is also mentioned in [Episode 1](#). The position of imperial huntsman was abolished in 905, and there is nothing in any historical record to suggest that **Narihira** himself ever held such a position. The Priestess of Ise was chosen from among unmarried female members of the imperial family and served at the Inner Shrine at Ise (see [Map 2](#)). As a rule, her tenure lasted the length of the emperor’s reign.

Because the Priestess of Ise served the Ise deity, it was a rule that she must remain a virgin and love affairs were strictly taboo; *saigū* could be dismissed from office if their liaisons were discovered. Here, despite the danger, the priestess responds to the hero’s advances, making this episode a truly memorable tale of forbidden love.

In the Japanese, the time given for the clandestine encounter arranged between the hero and the priestess is the first quarter of the hour of the rat (*ne hitotsu*): *ne* was the ‘hour of the rat’ (between 11 p.m. and 1 a.m.), and *hitotsu* is the first quarter of this period. Similarly, *ushi mittsu* (hour of the ox, third quarter) refers to the third quarter of the two-hour period between 1 a.m. and 3 a.m. Thus the two spend a period of approximately three hours together before the priestess returns to her rooms.

Did they consummate their relationship? The question has generated much controversy since ancient times. One way of reading the text is that they were so busy making love that they had no time to talk; an alternative is to assume that they were too bashful for physical love and sat gazing at each other for the entire time. Medieval commentators had a third view: the affairs of members of the imperial family were not an appropriate topic for discussion so what truly happened was of no concern to the reader. Even so, it tended to be assumed at the time that Narihira and the priestess made love. The key to the ambiguity in the scene is the use of the word ***monogataraui***. Several episodes use this word, which can mean both simple ‘conversation’ and, in certain contexts, the talk after lovemaking, or even being intimate together.

The rest of the episode examines the couple’s brief but intense

affair. The hero, filled with melancholy, cannot sleep, and the following morning, he wishes to communicate somehow with the priestess. Because any liaison with the *saigū* was forbidden, however, he cannot act in a way that might arouse suspicion. Then a poem arrives from the priestess, though it was more usual for a man to send his lover a ‘morning-after’ poem (*kinuginu no uta*).

The first poem takes the form of a series of questions, a device widely used in Chinese poetry, such as by Bai Juyi (see [here](#)), whose influence this poem is thought to reflect. Indeed, the section from the beginning of the episode to the end of the second poem is thought to have been composed by Narihira as a story of forbidden love based on the Chinese work *Yingying zhuan*, whose author, Yuan Zhen (see [here](#)), was a friend of Bai Juyi. The scene of the priestess appearing in the man’s room bathed in moonlight, for example, closely resembles one in the Chinese work. Unlike [Episode 69](#), however, there is no doubt in *Yingying zhuan* that the two lovers enjoyed conjugal relations.

If the first encounter was difficult to arrange, continuing the affair proves even more so because the hero has official duties and cannot act freely. During the day, he goes out hunting, and in the evening he is entertained by the governor of Ise, who was also the director of the Saigūryō, the bureau in charge of the office of the Priestess of Ise. High officials from the capital had to be well entertained when they travelled to the provinces, and so the party for the imperial huntsman continues until morning. Because the hero has to leave for Owari Province (see also [Episode 7](#)) the same day, he cannot meet the priestess again.

The priestess leaves the first part of a poem written inside a sake cup, so that only the hero would see it. The poem expresses her regret that their relationship has been so shallow. The word *e* (river) in line three of the Japanese is a pun (*kakekotoba*), which when read with the first letter of *ni* creates *en* (connection), the sense translated here as ‘what was between us’. The exact meaning of the phrase *sakazuki no sara* (literally, ‘sake plate’) is unclear: it may refer to the sake cup itself or to the plate upon which the cup was placed. Because the sake ‘cups’ used at banquets at this time were flattish, unglazed earthenware bowls, the expression may well be a way of referring to the drinking vessel.

The tale in this episode is almost certainly fictional. However, the same poem and reply are included in the *Kokinshū* (nos. 645 and 646) – the second attributed to Narihira – with a headnote that could be interpreted to mean that Narihira’s partner could have been either the Priestess of Ise herself or a handmaiden. Its incorporation in the *Tales* eventually resulted in acceptance of the liaison as fact. A number of points, however, suggest otherwise. The first poem, attributed to the

priestess, employs rhetorical features more characteristic of Narihira (alternative questions, inversion). We also know that the post of imperial huntsman did not exist at the time of Seiwa (the **Mizunoo Emperor** – see below) and that the priestess at that point (Princess Yasuko – see below) was not dismissed but completed her full term of office. That the facticity is left open to interpretation seems to be quite deliberate and adds to the richness of the narrative.

imperial huntsman: A version of the *Tales* referred to as the ‘Kari no Tsukai’ (Imperial Huntsman) manuscript, no longer extant, began with this episode. Some scholars consider this the main reason for the present title of the work, *The Tales of Ise*.

flood of tears ... tears of blood: See **otoko naki** (crying of men) and **chi no namida** (tears of blood).

the Meeting Barrier: This was the border post and checkpoint at Mount Osaka (literally, ‘meeting hill’; *Aūsaka yama* in the ancient spelling), between the capital (Heiankyo/Kyoto) and Lake Biwa (see [Map 2](#)). It was frequently used as a pun for a lovers’ meeting. Here, too, ‘cross[ing] the Meeting Barrier’ is the hero’s pledge to meet the priestess again one day.

Mizunoo Emperor: A reference to **Emperor Seiwa** (see also [Episode 65](#)).

70

Sea-Tangle

[Episode 70](#) may be read as a continuation of [Episode 69](#). Oyodo (see [Map 2](#)) is in the district of Take in present-day Mie Prefecture. It was important as a harbour, as it was connected to the residence of the **Priestess of Ise** by a river, suggesting that people could have travelled between the Ise Shrine and the residence by boat. Today, the place is called Oizu. In [Episode 69](#), the hero leaves the palace of the priestess to travel to Owari, and it is generally assumed that he would have taken a boat from Oyodo. As noted in [Episode 69](#), both the building that served as the main residence of the Priestess of Ise and the priestess herself were known as *saigū*. The *saigū* was not adjacent to the shrines in Yamada but some six miles to the north-west, near Ise Bay. The female attendant in this episode brings to mind the ‘little girl’ of [Episode 69](#).

In the poem, several puns (*kakekotoba*) are used, including *mirume* (which puns on ‘seaweed’ and ‘eyes that see’, i.e. ‘to meet’) and *kata* (which means both ‘direction’ and ‘method’). The poem appears to be asking where seaweed might be found, but what the hero is really asking is how he can meet his beloved. The phrase *mirume karu*

(meaning the ‘meeting’ of lovers and ‘to gather seaweed’) was a standard expression in the poetry of the time and appears several times in the *Tales* ([Episodes 25, 75](#) and *miru* in 104). In the translation, I have replicated the puns with the words ‘see-tangle’ for ‘sea-tangle’ – the actual name of a type of seaweed – and ‘sea-we’d’, which puns on ‘seaweed.’

71

Traversing the Sacred Fence

[Episode 71](#) features a poem by the hero that expresses the open-minded attitude towards love in pre-modern Japan. Like [Episodes 69](#) and [70](#), it concerns the **Priestess of Ise**. However, in this episode a flirtatious lady expresses her own love for the man, rather than that of the Priestess of Ise, on whose behalf she is supposed to be speaking.

In the first poem, the lady expresses her yearning for the hero’s love. The word *Chihayaburu*, translated here as ‘raging’, is a pillow word (*makura kotoba*) for *kami* (deity). The ‘sacred fence’ encircled a shrine, enclosing the holy area and sealing it from ‘pollution’ from the secular world. The first three lines of the poem appear in poems in the *Man’yōshū* (no. 2663) and in the *Shūishū* (no. 924), but with different final sections.

The second poem is the hero’s reply, in which he welcomes the lady’s profession of love. It skilfully and humorously asserts that even raging gods never stand in the way of love, thus echoing the lady’s original image of fiercesome gods in order to gain her. The word ‘rail’ (in ‘rail against’) puns on the ‘fence’ of the first poem. In Japanese myth, many gods were born of the union of male and female deities, and sexual union and fertility have traditionally played an important role in both mythology and the Shinto religion, which has a very open-minded view of sex. Part of this poem is quoted in the last chapter in *The Tale of Genji*.

72

The Pine of Oyodo

[Episode 72](#) continues to develop the theme introduced in [Episode 69](#) of lovers meeting only once. Commentators usually identify the ‘neighbouring province’ as Owari and the ‘lady in the province of Ise’ as the **Priestess of Ise**, although she is not mentioned explicitly. [Episode 72](#) can be seen as a kind of appendix to [Episodes 69, 70](#) and [71](#), all of which focus on the hero’s affair with the priestess.

In comparing herself to a pine tree (‘Oyodo pine’), the lady is referring to a beautiful grove of pines that even today grow along the

Oyodo coast. The word *uramite* in the original Japanese is a pun (*kakekotoba*) meaning both ‘seeing the beach’ and ‘resentment’. (Oyodo (see [Map 2](#)) also features in [Episode 70](#).)

73

Within the Moon

The poem in [Episode 73](#) is based on an ancient Chinese legend that a laurel tree grows on the moon. It was employed in poetry as a metaphor for something out of reach. The hero’s poem is to a lady to whom he cannot convey his feelings because it is forbidden. Though the identity of the person is not revealed, as this tale comes in a sequence of episodes concerning the **Priestess of Ise**, it is natural to assume that she is the object of the hero’s affections.

The poem is very similar to one found in the *Man’yōshū* (no. 632) and in the late tenth-century *Kokin waka rokujō* (Six Volumes of *Waka* Old and New; no. 4288), of which it is thought to be a reworking.

74

Piling up like Rocks

[Episode 74](#) is another instance of the hero’s disappointed love for the **Priestess of Ise** (in the sequence beginning with [Episode 69](#)). His poem expresses the resentment he feels towards her in the face of her indifference. Even though there is no physical barrier actually separating them, the fact that they have been unable to meet for some time is like an unassailable mountain separating them. Once again, similar poems appear in the *Man’yōshū* (no. 2422) and in the *Shūishū* (no. 969), and the present poem is probably a reworking of the older *Man’yōshū* one.

75

‘See-Weed, See-Shells’

[Episode 75](#) features an exchange of poems based on the trope of *mirume*, a kind of seaweed (see also [Episodes 25](#) and [70](#) and *miru* in [Episode 104](#)). The reference to the province of Ise (see [Map 2](#)) at the beginning, and ‘This woman was indeed difficult to court’ in the final sentence, suggests that this episode is part of the sequence about the hero’s affair with the **Priestess of Ise**. Unlike the previous episodes, however, this one takes place in the capital, and the tenor is completely different. Indeed, the rejection of the hero by the lady has always been considered an appropriate way to complete the sequence

set in Ise, as Katagiri points out.

The first poem is sent by a lady who refuses the hero's invitation to follow him to Ise. In the original Japanese, the phrase *Oyodo no / hama ni ou chō* ('(that) grows on Oyodo shore') prefaces the familiar pivot word (see **kakekotoba**) *miru*. Here, however, it does not imply a tryst between a man and a woman. *Naginu* is a pun, meaning both '(the sea) is calm' and 'to have peace of mind'. Here the lady rejects the hero's pursuit: meeting each other occasionally without becoming lovers (making 'vows' to each other) will be sufficient for her.

The poem is interesting in its use of the word *katarau* in the negative form (*katarawanedomo*), which here seems to mean not 'small talk' but rather – according to Fukui – 'sleeping together', suggesting that the verb can mean both 'talking' and 'sleeping together'. This suggests that other uses of the verb, such as in [Episode 69](#), are also open to interpretation.

In the second poem, the hero entreats the cold-hearted lady, asking whether their relationship is going to end without their actually meeting. The first three lines serve as a preface for *miru* (seeing), in the fourth line.

The third poem constitutes a clever attempt by the lady to console the hero. The phrase *Iwama yori / ouru* (springing up from between the rocks) is a preface (**jokotoba**) for *mirume* (see/seaweed). The word *kai* is a pun meaning both 'shell' and 'effect/result'. The words *Iwama* (between the rocks), *mirume* (seaweed), *shio hi shio michi* (tides flow in and out) and *kai* (shell) are all associative words (**engo**). The poem suggests that, just as tides flow in and out as time passes, so continuously 'seeing' one another may one day lead to their exchanging of vows.

In the fourth poem, the hero expresses his grief at failing to win the lady's heart. The words *yo no hito* usually mean 'people' in general, but here they refer to the lady in particular. The poem asserts that her coldness is the cause of the tears that are drenching his sleeves. The poem appears in Ki no Tsurayuki's anthology, *Tsurayuki-shū*, and it is possible that Tsurayuki (see [here](#)) was the author of this episode.

This is one of many episodes that feature a 'venerable old man' (**okina**) as the central character. Here it is generally assumed to be the ageing **Narihira**, not only because he is identified as the author of the poem in this episode in the **Kokinshū** (no. 871) but because of the reference to his position in the Imperial Guard. Katagiri suggests that *okina* here might refer to one who is appointed to compose poems of

celebration on occasions such as a birth in the imperial family (see [Episode 79](#)) or, as here, a pilgrimage to a sacred site. In that sense, the position of *okina* is one of great honour.

The episode also offers insight into the relationship between Takaiko, the **Empress of the Second Avenue**, and Narihira. Even though the poem sent by the hero never actually mentions a love affair, its last section can be read as asking: ‘Do you remember when we loved each other in the past?’ This is partly conveyed by the narrator’s ironic final comment, especially the word *kanashi* (sad): ‘Was it some deep sorrow that was troubling him? What were his feelings? No one knows.’ These words hint at a past love affair between the two main characters and imply that this is exactly what the hero had in mind. Since the hero cannot be feeling sadness because of the ancient past (‘the Age of the Gods’ he mentions in his poem), it must be connected with his own past. The author displays consummate skill in subtly implying that, in fact, the poem has a totally different meaning from what appears on its surface. The hidden meaning is more obscure in the original Japanese, which seems to be talking only about the Age of the Gods. The translation of the poem makes the suggestion that they were involved with each other in the past clearer, and that the hero is indeed recalling both their past and the ancient past.

In the *Kokinshū* version of this poem, there is no narrator’s comment, and no indication is given of a past love affair between the two main characters. In the longer version of the tale that appears in the *Yamato monogatari* (no. 161), there is a clear link to the affair between Takaiko and Narihira. The version in the *Tales* lies somewhere in between, and the content is deliberately left ambiguous, as in other episodes in the *Tales* (see, for example, [Episode 69](#)). This episode was probably based on the poem in the *Kokinshū*, with the references by the narrator to the affair between Narihira and Takaiko added later.

consort mother of the crown prince: Takaiko was consort of **Emperor Seiwa**; her son would become **Emperor Yozei**.

the august shrine of her ancestral deities: A reference to Oharano Shrine in Ohara in the south-west part of Kyoto (then Yamashiro Province – see [Map 3](#)). Four ‘ancestral deities’ were venerated in the shrine, including that of Takaiko and the Fujiwara ancestral deity, Ame no koyane no mikoto. Fujiwara-born **imperial consorts** (‘empresses’) would often visit this shrine to pay their respects. Takaiko was probably making the visit referred to here to report to the deities that her son had been confirmed as crown prince, eventually to ascend the throne as emperor, thus perpetuating the

Fujiwara line.

in service in the Imperial Guard: The Bureau of the Imperial Guard was the office that provided the personnel responsible for protecting the palace. Ariwara no Narihira served as a captain. (See also commentary to [Episode 87](#).)

received his gift ... from her carriage: Gifts or stipends were bestowed in appreciation of services rendered; here, Narihira receives one for his role as an accompanying guard. It would probably have been a piece of cloth or articles of clothing. The carriage was the ox-drawn vehicle in which Takaiko was riding; the hero receives his gift directly from her.

Mount Oshio: A hill (see [Map 3](#)) behind the Ohara Shrine, where the shrine's deity was thought to reside.

Age of the Gods: Referring to the time when the legendary Ninigi descended from the Divine Plain of Heaven to pacify Japan. At that time, Amaterasu, the ruler of the heavenly realm, ordered the Fujiwara ancestral deity Ame no koyane no mikoto to guard the future imperial line for eternity. The poem states how the god of Oharano must be overjoyed to be informed that the son of a Fujiwara woman had been designated crown prince, reminding him of the command he received from Amaterasu during the Age of the Gods.

77

The Parting of Spring

[Episode 77](#) features a poem by the hero as a 'venerable old man' (*okina*). There is a specific genre of tales told by this figure that are called *okinagatari* (literally, 'a venerable old man's stories'). Recalling fondly the time when a family flourished in the past, praising the elegant tradition that they represent and longing for their return were regarded as highly suitable topics for a venerable man's poem. Praising the past glories of a house in decline is itself an important theme of the *Tales*, and [Episode 77](#) is based on this theme.

In the old man's poem, 'the parting of spring' (*haru no wakare*) refers to an important theme in the *Tales* – spring as a symbol of the fleeting nature of life. (See [sangatsujin \(the last day of spring\)](#).) There are several episodes (nos. 80 and 83, among others) on the same theme. Here the expression refers not just to the changing of the seasons but to the poignant parting of **Takakiko** at the same time that the spring itself departs. (The historical Takakiko passed away in the eleventh month of 858, midwinter in the **lunisolar calendar**.)

Although the narrator appears to speak unfavourably of the old man's poem at the end, the tone is very playful and tongue-in-cheek,

suggesting fondness for the old man and implicit admiration of the poem.

Tamura Emperor: A reference to **Emperor Montoku** based on the location of his mausoleum.

memorial services: These were held at prescribed intervals after the person's death, such as on the forty-ninth day (see the commentary to the next episode), the hundredth day and the first anniversary. Which particular memorial service the episode describes is not stated, though the context of the poem suggests that it was held in late spring.

Anshoji Temple: Anshoji, a temple in the eastern part of Kyoto, was built by Montoku's mother, Junshi, the **Empress of the Fifth Avenue**.

ceremony: This is a translation of *kō*, part of a memorial service and a word that has its origins in lectures on the Buddhist scriptures.

Fujiwara Tsuneyuki ... the elderly Chief Equerry of the Right: For Fujiwara **Tsuneyuki**, see Appendix 2 ([here](#)). The Chief Equerry of the **Right** was the highest-ranking officer in the bureau, responsible for managing horses both at the palace and around the country. Ariwara no **Narihira** held this position but only after 865. Here, though, the central character is said to be an elderly man, who, because of his poor eyesight, mistakes the mountain of offerings for a real one – a moment probably intended to be humorous.

78

The Heart Has No Colours

The *Tales* is particularly concerned with families of declining fortunes, such as the Ariwara and the Ki (see the commentary to [Episode 16](#)). The hidden focus of this particular tale is an episode from the life of Fujiwara no **Yoshimi**, a once-powerful member of the Fujiwara who was on the verge of being completely forgotten. The account of **Tsuneyuki** and **Narihira** showing their heartfelt devotion to the 'cloistered prince' (**Prince Saneyasu**) after he has left the secular world behind reminds one of Narihira's visit to Prince Koretaka in [Episode 83](#). In an ever-changing world, the heart that is always true is an important theme of the *Tales*. Love between men and women is often fickle and fleeting but fealty, devotion or friendship among men is one of the most lasting things in the Heian universe.

As in [Episode 77](#), events take place at the time of **Takakiko's** memorial service. Here, Fujiwara Tsuneyuki is returning home with some others when he decides to visit Prince Saneyasu, who had taken Buddhist vows and is living in Yamashina. It is unclear how the poem

composed by the hero – the ‘Chief Equerry of the **Right**’ (see the commentary to the previous episode) – was placed on the stone and several theories have been put forward to explain it. One is that it was etched into the moss on the stone like *makie* lacquer (see below) by carving out the growing moss in the shapes of the letters; another is that pieces of moss were cut in the shapes of the letters and placed on the bare stone.

Tsuneyuki explains how the stone had originally been presented to ‘His Majesty’ **Emperor Seiwa** when the latter visited the Third Avenue residence of Tsuneyuki’s father, Yoshimi. The actual imperial visit took place in 866, seven years after the memorial services for Takakiko (859) were held. Here, however, it is depicted as an event in the past. The year 866 was that of the famous Otenmon Incident, in which members of the powerful aristocratic families were accused of setting fire to one of the gates of the imperial palace and were either executed or removed from politics. The incident made Fujiwara no **Yoshifusa** the undisputed arbiter of court affairs, while the power of others, such as his younger brother and rival Yoshimi, declined. This story provides the underlying historical context of the tale.

memorial service ... on the forty-ninth day: A memorial service was held on this day according to the belief current at the time in Japanese Buddhism that the dead wandered for the first forty-nine days after their passing. Services were held every seven days so that the deceased person might reach paradise without losing his way, and the forty-ninth day was the last in this sequence.

Anshoji Temple: See the commentary to the previous episode.

beach of Chisato in the province of Ki: Ki (see [Map 2](#)) is the ancient name of present-day Wakayama Prefecture, and Chisato is famous for its beautiful coastline.

guardsmen: These were the bodyguards of the nobility and were under the control of the Bureau of the Imperial Guard (see the commentary to [Episodes 76](#) and [87](#)). They performed various duties for the emperor and the aristocracy.

gold lacquer: A reference to *maki-e* (literally, ‘sprinkled picture’), a Japanese type of lacquer consisting of an image in gold or silver on the surface or one sprinkled with gold or silver flakes or powder as a decoration. The technique was developed mainly in the Heian period and reached its peak in the Edo period (1603–1868).

clan, the hero's own family (see the commentary to [Episode 16](#)), and how the birth of a prince into the clan is thus the cause for great celebration. **Narihira**, the prince's maternal grandfather, writes a poem commemorating the fact that a daughter of the clan has given birth to an emperor's son. Celebrations would have taken place on the third, fifth, seventh and ninth evenings after the birth. The congratulatory poem asserts that the prince's growth and prosperity will in turn bring prosperity to the whole family. Although the image has its origins in Chinese literature, using the proverbially sturdy bamboo as a metaphor for the imperial family was common.

The final word, given as usual by the narrator, provides historical referents for the people mentioned in the episode. Prince Sadakazu (875–916) was the eighth son of **Emperor Seiwa**. His mother, Fumiko, was the daughter of Narihira's elder brother, **Yukihira**, who also appears in [Episode 87](#). This welcoming of a new member into the imperial family may be seen as an attempt to bolster the fading fortunes of the family, in reputation if not in fact.

One of the key themes of the *Tales* is forbidden love, of which there are numerous accounts. But it is surprising that the narrator introduces in this episode the suggestion that the emperor's consort and Narihira had engaged in an illicit affair. Though an obvious fictionalization, it is difficult to see what the rumour could contribute to this kind of celebratory tale, and it is thought that the narrator's comment was appended later, as is the case in [Episode 6](#). Other depictions of the illicit affair between the hero and the emperor's consort or daughter occur in the opening episodes of the *Tales*, along with [Episode 65](#) and the sequence from [Episode 69](#) onwards. Forbidden love would also become a major theme in *The Tale of Genji*.

As usual, Narihira is not referred to by name; in the opening section of the original Japanese, he is referred to only as an 'elder member on the grandfather's side of the family', but I have made his relation clearer in the translation, adding his actual name. As in previous episodes, he is presented as an elderly man (*okina*). And as in [Episodes 63](#) and [76](#), Narihira is referred to in the Japanese as the captain, so a more literal rendering of the first part of the last sentence might read: 'People at the time spread a rumour that he was the son of that captain.'

[Episode 80](#) depicts a celebration of the end of spring and the exemplary behaviour by the hero, despite the decline in his family's

fortunes. The hero plucks some wisteria flowers at the end of the third month (that is, on one of the last days of spring) and sends them, with a poem, to a person of higher rank, indicated by the use of an honorific form of the verb ‘to present’. In the **lunisolar calendar**, the third month was the last month of spring, and marking the passing of the last day of spring (*sangatsujin*) was a popular theme in both Japanese- and Chinese-language poetry in Japan. The passing of spring is also lamented in [Episodes 83](#) and [91](#), among others.

The association of wisteria blossoms with the end of spring follows a famous poem by the Chinese poet Bai Juyi (see [here](#)). The hero’s plucking of the flowers in the rain is an example of the custom of emphasizing the lengths to which one had gone to acquire the gift being sent; it shows that his behaviour is truly elegant. [Episodes 16](#) and [52](#) depict a similar instance. Wisteria blossoms (*fuji*) may also be a reference to the Fujiwara clan (the name of which puns with *fuji*; see also [Episode 101](#)), although there is no conclusive evidence to support this theory and Yamamoto believes there is no pun. But there is no element of doubt in [Episode 101](#), by contrast, where *fuji* is clearly punned upon.

This poem is found also in the *Kokinshū* (no. 133, attributed to Ariwara no **Narihira**) with a concise headnote. In the *Tales*, the headnote is slightly expanded with the addition of ‘a house of declining fortunes’ and the changing of the verb ‘to present’ to an honorific form.

81

Sailing into a Garden

Throughout the *Tales*, the authors’ sympathy lies clearly with those who lack power. [Episode 81](#) is a fine example of this. The object of the author’s sympathy is here the ninth-century Minister of the **Left** Minamoto no **Toru**, who had been reduced from imperial rank to that of commoner but rose very high in the bureaucracy. A famous poem by him is quoted in [Episode 1](#). He is also famous for his mansion on the banks of the Kamo River in the Sixth Avenue (the Kawara mansion – see [Map 3](#)), which is the setting for this episode; known as the ‘Riverside Palace’, it served as the model for Prince Genji’s own Rokujo Palace in *The Tale of Genji*.

Minamoto no Toru was a man of great refinement, whose elegance and moral superiority are shown here through his interest in gardens, which are often referred to in the *Tales*. The cloistered prince’s love of gardens is mentioned in [Episode 78](#), for instance, the special stone being presented to him by someone who is aware of this. A sensibility for the beauty of flowers and gardens infuses the *Tales* with aesthetic

lustre and refinement.

In his poem, the hero, **Narihira**, seeks to compliment the minister by suggesting that the garden is indistinguishable from the one that it imitates. The motif of the elderly man being confused or pretending to be confused about something in the landscape is also employed in [Episode 77](#), where an old man confuses artificial trees for real ones; here, he appears to mistake the garden for the actual Shiogama. In a deft stroke, the hero as venerable old man (**okina**) claims that the garden is so like Shiogama that he feels as if he has been transported there in person. The gentle criticisms that follow, which seem to mockingly refer to the poet's age, are in fact praising his delicate sensibility and marvellous poem.

[Episode 81](#) is another important example of 'venerable old man tales' (*okinagatari*; see **okina** and the commentary to [Episode 77](#)). Here we have an old man, Narihira, who tells a poem based on his own past. He is referred to as an 'old tramp' (*katai okina*), a disrespectful mode of address that has connotations of being shabby and wretched. But this is just another example of playful deprecation – because the hero is in the presence of an exalted person – and not meant to be taken seriously.

fading chrysanthemums ... many shades of red: Chrysanthemums that had reddened from the frost as the season changed from late autumn to winter were highly prized (see [Episode 18](#)). In the Japanese, the headnote tells us that the time was the tenth month of the **lunisolar calendar**.

viewing stands: The word *itajiki* (viewing stands) refers to a low wooden veranda open to the weather. Straw mats were placed on the wooden floors, but only where people sat. Because of the old man's low rank, he is not allowed to sit on the stand to compose his poem but must prostrate himself on the ground below.

This tale tells of the close friendship between **Narihira**, the hero of the *Tales*, and **Prince Koretaka**, the first son of **Emperor Montoku** and a likely successor to the throne. However, it was Montoku's fourth son, Korehito, born in 850 to a member of the Fujiwara clan, who was named crown prince and eventually became **Emperor Seiwa**. Koretaka was ordained as a Buddhist priest in 872 (see the commentary to the next episode); thus, having never reached the throne, he was known from then onwards as a man of adverse fortune. He was a kinsman of Narihira, who had married Koretaka's cousin on

his mother's side; Narihira was nineteen years his senior. Narihira is referred to here by his title, the Chief Equerry of the **Right** (see the commentary to [Episode 77](#)). The assertion that his name had been forgotten is, of course, a humorous fiction.

Katagiri suggests that [Episodes 82](#) and [83](#) offer an emotional and visual contrast to each other. In [Episode 82](#) feelings of amity and affection are expressed beneath the glorious colours of the cherry blossoms at Minase and Katano. [Episode 83](#), which reminds one of an ink-wash painting, focuses by contrast on the tears that flow amid the snow at the base of solitary Mount Hie.

The fact that all the members of the gathering compose poems suggests that the act of composition here transcends all differences in rank. The first poem is one of the best known in the *Tales*. It describes, in the form of a paradox, the poet's deep love of cherry blossoms. The poem is also found in the *Kokinshū* (no. 53), attributed to Narihira, and is quoted in Ki no Tsurayuki's *Tosa nikki* (Tosa Diary; 935). The last line of the poem may be read as either 'the heart of spring', as rendered here, or 'our hearts in spring' – it is up to the reader. The second poem is a response to the first and asserts that it is the very fleeting quality of cherry blossoms that makes them so beautiful.

The third poem is composed by the equerry in response to an order by Prince Koretaka, after the party has arrived at the 'River of Heaven', located about half a mile south of the Nagisa mansion (see note below). A tributary of the Yodo River (see [Map 3](#)), it flows through the Kinya area of the city of Hirakata in present-day Osaka Prefecture. As 'River of Heaven' is another name for the Milky Way, the poem suggests that since they have arrived at the River of Heaven, they should ask the Weaving Maid for lodgings – a reference to the **Tanabata legend**. This poem is also found in the *Kokinshū* (no. 418).

The prince is greatly moved by this poem but cannot come up with a suitable reply, so his uncle (and Narihira's father-in-law) Ki no **Aritsune** composes one in his stead (see *daisaku* (**proxy composition**)). The reply posits that since the Weaving Maid, according to the legend, can meet the Herd Boy only once a year, it is unlikely that she would let other men stay. This poem is thought to be based on an earlier one in the *Kokinshū* (no. 419), where it is attributed to Aritsune.

After composing the poems, the party returns to Koretaka's residence in Minase, where they talk (see *monogataraui*) and drink through the night. Just as the prince, the worse for drink, is about to retire to bed, the equerry detains him with another poem, the fifth in the episode. Under the **lunisolar calendar**, the moon gradually grew larger during the first half of the month, became full on the fifteenth day, and then waned in the second half; it rose and sank at slightly

different times of the night over the course of the month. The moon of the eleventh day would have sunk around 2–3 a.m. By using the moon as an image for the prince, and asking it not to disappear over the mountains, the poem expresses regret that he is about to go to bed. The poem appears in the *Kokinshū* (no. 884) with a very similar context provided in the headnote.

Again, as the prince cannot compose a reply, Ki no Arisune offers one in his stead. This sixth poem states much the same as the fifth – that the poet wishes the prince would remain with them. A similar poem appears in the *Gosenshū* (no. 1249), but the author is said to be Kanzuke Mineo, about whom little is known.

Minase beyond Yamazaki: Yamazaki (see [Map 3](#)) was an important port on the Yodo River south-west of the capital (Heiankyo/Kyoto). Today it is known as Oyamazaki, in the district of Otokuni in Kyoto Prefecture. Minase (see [Map 3](#)) was an adjacent area further south-west. It is now called Hirose, a part of Shimamoto in Mishima District, Osaka Prefecture. This whole area was an imperial hunting ground.

Katano ... Nagisa mansion: Katano is now part of the city of Hirakata, Osaka Prefecture. The Nagisa mansion (see [Maps 2](#) and [3](#)) was an imperial villa also known as the Nagisa Palace, located on the opposite bank of the Yodo River from Minase.

placed [cherry blossoms] in their hair: All members of the party decorate their hair with sprigs of cherry blossom, making a crown, a practice with its origins in a kind of magical ritual. However, by this time, it was reserved for celebratory occasions.

Toiling Through Snow

The pure heart – the heart that remains unchanged in the face of adversity – is one of the central themes of the *Tales*, and [Episode 83](#) provides an excellent example. Despite being busy with official duties, **Narihira** makes his way through the snow to show his fealty and love for **Prince Koretaka**. [Episodes 82](#) and [85](#) similarly celebrate Narihira's close friendship with the prince.

In this episode, the hero is referred to as 'the elderly chief equerry', continuing the pattern in [Episodes 76](#) and [81](#), where the main character is a venerable old man (*okina*), though this could apply to someone in their middle years. In the opening paragraph, the words 'trying to discover what his true wishes might be' refers to the equerry's perplexity about not being given leave to return home. He composes the ensuing poem to ascertain that the prince wants him to

stay, assuring him that he has no need to sleep and is willing to sit up with him until dawn. The expression ‘bound grasses’ (*kusa hikinushu*) in the first poem refers to ‘staying away overnight’, in this case, specifically at Koretaka’s residence. When people slept outdoors they would bind grass to make a pillow. The reference to ‘autumn nights’, in both Chinese- and Japanese-language poetry, indicates a relatively long period of time (nights being longer at that time of year). At the time of the tale, it was in fact the last day of spring, so the period of time spent together would be much shorter. This poem appears in two slightly different versions in the late tenth-century *Kokin waka rokujō* (Six Volumes of *Waka* Old and New; nos. 2424 and 3242).

As we have seen, the last day of spring (*sangatsujin*) had been a popular topic of poetry from the time of Bai Juyi (see [here](#)) in China (see also [Episodes 77](#), [80](#) and [91](#), among others). The equerry invites the prince to join him in lamenting the departure of spring, and both men, understanding its significance, elegantly mourn its passing together. The tale continues with the prince taking ordination as a monk. According to the chronicle *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* (True History of Three Reigns; 886), Koretaka took vows in the seventh month of 872, when he was in his twenty-ninth year. Illness may have been a reason, but it has generally been interpreted as a consequence of his failure to become emperor (see the commentary to the previous episode).

This part of the tale focuses on the conflict between official duty – that is, attendance on the emperor by members of the nobility – and private matters. The hero must return to the palace to perform his official duties. In the world of the *Tales*, official duties sometimes intrude on private relationships.

The poem in this section, one of the best known in the *Tales*, asks whether it is a dream that the man has tramped through deep snow to meet the prince. It is included in the *Kokinshū* (no. 970, attributed to Narihira), though the headnote there says the poem was composed after Narihira’s return to the city. It is also included in the *Kokin waka rokujō* (no. 715).

Minase: Minase, which provides the setting for the first part of [Episode 82](#), is described in the commentary to that tale.

Ono at the foot of Mount Hie: Ono refers to a broad area below Mount Hie (see [Maps 2](#) and [3](#)) extending as far as Hase and Ohara, located in what is now the north-west part of Sakyo-ku in Kyoto. It also appears as the name of a village in *The Tale of Genji*. The prince’s place of retreat was said to be near Ohara, though its exact location is not known; his grave is also there. Mount Hie also

features in [Episode 9](#).
weeping bitterly: See *otoko naki* (crying of men).

84

A Son's Wish

This episode features an exchange of poems between the hero and his mother, **Princess Ito**. The fact that **Narihira** is said in this episode to be the lady's 'only son' means that he had no siblings by her, and that **Yukihira** ([Episodes 79](#) and [101](#)) was, in fact, his half-brother. By indicating that her letter is urgent, Narihira's mother warns him that it probably contains bad news, and indeed, her poem tells of her impending death. The hero's reply is a prayer that his mother might live 'a thousand years' (*chiyo*), expressing his deep love for his mother through a plea that death might disappear from the world.

Both poems are included in the *Kokinshū* (nos. 900 and 901, attributed to Princess Ito and Narihira, respectively). Sei Shonagon refers to this episode in her eleventh-century *Makura no sōshi* (Pillow Book; no. 293), saying that the letter was very touching and that she could imagine Narihira's feelings when he read his mother's poem.

Nagaoka: Nagaoka (see [Map 3](#)) is also the setting of [Episode 58](#).

My Heart's the Snow

In focusing on the deep friendship between the hero and **Prince Koretaka** (not mentioned here by name), [Episode 85](#) forms a triptych with [Episodes 82](#) and [83](#). The salient aspect of all three episodes is that the hero remains true to Koretaka despite his downfall. Though we are told that he had been in the service of the prince since childhood (thus implying that he was younger than Koretaka), the historical **Narihira** was nineteen years his senior. [Episode 83](#) also speaks of Koretaka's taking Buddhist orders.

In contrasting the body ('I cannot split myself in two') with the heart, the poem employs a conceit common at the time: though the man in his heart wishes to remain with the prince, in person he has to return to the capital to attend the emperor.

A similar poem is found in the *Kokinshū* (no. 373, attributed to Ikago no Atsuyuki), where the headnote states that it was composed for someone 'travelling to the eastern provinces'. The first two lines are the same, but the last three read: *mi ni mienu / kokoro o kimi ni / taguete zo yaru* (I will send my heart with you, though it can't be seen). Thus it is not certain that the poem in this episode is a reworking of the older one.

he removed his robe: Taking off one's robe to give it to another as a gift was common among aristocrats at the time (see also [Episodes 16](#) and [62](#)).

Past Loves

[Episode 86](#) is typical of the kind of tale that is effective in the original Japanese but appears flat in translation. There is too little in the narrative to stir interest, and it is very hard to interpret the real meaning of the poem, if indeed there is one; the plainness of the poem and the tale's lack of detail also make for an unsatisfactory tale in translation. However, for the Japanese readers of the time, the predicament of a couple who could not be together because of social and family considerations and who later try unsuccessfully to rekindle their relationship would have been a topic of considerable appeal. The poem is included in the late tenth-century *Kokin waka rokujō* (Six Volumes of *Waka* Old and New; no. 2917).

Travels in Ashiya

Several of the tales pay tribute to the genius of place, and [Episode 87](#) is a good example. A party of visitors from the capital takes a stroll in the village of Ashiya in the province of Settsu (see [Maps 2](#) and [3](#)), in the vicinity of modern-day Ashiya, near Kobe. There, they see the expansive ocean and great waterfalls, which up to that point they had only been able to imagine from the ponds in the gardens of their palaces. The theme of this episode is how excursions and the pleasures of the landscape can fill the heart with delight.

Katagiri argues that the first and second scenes of the episode are like those on a picture scroll, and they are meant to be read as if images accompanied them. In his view, when the *Tales* was composed, picture-scroll versions would have been in circulation. As evidence for his theory, he cites the numerous episodes in the work that have a strong visual quality and that can be better understood if one thinks of them as being supplemented by illustrations. This theory is not shared by all commentators, but it is certainly true that many of the episodes in the work are highly visual and suitable for illustration.

The hero, who has taken quarters in Ashiya, goes with his visiting brother and officers from the Imperial Guard to the Nunobiki Falls, where they compose poems. The first poem is similar to one in the *Man'yōshū* (no. 1777) that was probably reworked for use in this episode. The original poem is a folk song about a salt worker hurrying to visit her lover. (See also the poem in [Episode 112](#).)

The second poem is a complaint by the hero's brother, **Yukihara**, about his low position at court. The word *nami* is a pun (*kakekotoba*) linking 'Waiting without [hope]' (*matsu kai no / nami*) and 'tears' (*namida*). The falling tears are improbably likened to the towering waterfall. The third poem in the episode uses the metaphor of 'cascading pearls', too numerous to contain in a narrow sleeve, to describe the beauty of the falling water. This poem appears in the *Kokinshū* (no. 923), where it is attributed to **Narihira**. Though the sleeves are described as 'narrow', they would have been much wider than those of a European garment – more like the sleeves of a robe. The narrator's question about whether those present enjoyed the poem is clearly disingenuous, because we are then told how others praised it highly and refrained from composing their own. See also [Episodes 67](#) and [68](#) for other instances in which members of a group are so impressed by a poem that they decide not to compose one of their own.

In the beautiful fourth poem, the fires in baskets used for luring fish to the fishermen's boats are compared to stars and fireflies, as well as

providing an echo of the ‘salt fires’ in the first poem. Though common in Chinese poetry, this kind of sustained metaphor was something new in Japanese poetry (*waka*). A gift of seaweed accompanies the fifth poem, the reference to it being treasured by the ‘god of the sea’ (Watatsumi) indicating what a delicacy it must be. Adorning one’s hair – with a nod to ‘comb in my hair’ of the first poem – is also mentioned in [Episode 82](#). Indeed, it was not uncommon for men to decorate their hair with flowers for dance performances, etc., in the period.

At the end of the episode, the narrator humorously asks whether the final poem was a good one for a ‘country dweller’. His direct address to the reader recalls the question asked by the narrator at the end of [Episode 33](#). Here he suggests that since the woman presented the seaweed, she too wrote the poem, although it is more likely that the host did so and, like the poem in [Episode 33](#), it is very accomplished.

Imperial Guard: There were six guard units attached to the imperial palace (the **Left and Right** divisions of the Inner, Middle and Outer Imperial Guard), and the ‘junior officers’ employed therein were assistants to the commanders. Before he retired to Ashiya, Narihira had also served as a captain in the guards.

Nunobiki Waterfall: The Nunobiki Falls are a renowned series of waterfalls in the mountains east of Kobe. The name ‘Nunobiki’ (literally, ‘cloth-pulling’) likens the cascades to cloth being stretched out to be bleached.

Mochiyoshi, the late head of the Imperial Household: Nothing further is known about Mochiyoshi. His name is given without honorifics, however, so he must have been well known to readers of the time.

The Rounds of the Moon

The *Kokinshū* includes thirty-three poems that feature the moon, but no. 879, which is also included in this episode – without a headnote but attributed to **Narihira** – is one of the freshest and most original. While many poems praise the beauty of the moon, this one opens with the assertion that the poet does not normally enjoy looking at it – a startling admission to a group of people gathered specifically for the purpose of admiring the moon. But though the poem begins with a surprise, it develops into something more profound. The word ‘moon’ (*tsuki*) forms a pun with *toshi-tsuki* (literally, ‘the passage of the months’) to express regret at the passing of the years.

This witty but lyrical rendering of ever-encroaching old age would surely have earned the praise of those assembled there. Narihira is

likely to have been influenced here by the poetry of Bai Juyi (see [here](#)), who wrote that when he looked at the moon he thought about the past, which brought to mind dissipation and the advent of old age. Narihira's audience would have picked up this reference to Bai Juyi. During the Heian period, looking at the moon was often thought to be inauspicious and thus avoided, and this famous poem may have been the reason why.

89

Which God Would They Blame?

Episode 89 features a poem on the difficulty of conducting a romance when there is a gap in social rank. In **Episode 89**, the hero is referred to as 'a man not of low rank himself' (*iyashikaranu otoko*), but Katagiri has drawn attention to the use of the term *iyashi* (lower social status), employed in a way that illustrates what must have been a very real issue at the time: before Takaiko became **Empress of the Second Avenue**, she was actually of lower rank than the hero, **Narihira**, as the grandson of two emperors. However, after she became a consort of **Emperor Seiwa**, her rank would have been too high for him to meet her. While the poem suggests blaming this state of affairs on the gods, the problem is of course entirely man-made.

Many similar poems appear in the ***Man'yōshu***, making it very likely that this episode was constructed around one of these.

90

By Tomorrow ...

Episode 90 features a poem that compares the capriciousness of the lady to whom it is addressed to short-lived cherry blossoms. The lady has finally agreed to meet the hero from behind a screen; meeting with a lady who is behind a screen or curtain represented a step further in a relationship after the initial exchange of letters (see [here](#)), because the two could converse directly. Being unsure of her feelings, he sends her a poem in which he asks whether her love will fade as quickly as the blossoms do. The evanescent cherry blossom was commonly employed as a metaphor for inconstancy. Other examples appear in **Episodes 17** and **50**.

The final comment by the narrator is unusual in the way in which it clearly expresses sympathy for the predicament of the hero.

91

The Last Day of Spring

The *Tales* contains many fine poems on the four seasons, and [Episode 91](#) includes an exemplary poem on the last day of spring (*sangatsujin*); see also [Episode 80](#). The poem mourns both the end of the beautiful season of spring and the relentless passing of life. It appears in much the same form in the *Gosenshū* (no. 141), and this episode was probably created around it. The cause of the hero's unhappiness is not made clear here, but at the time it was one of the requirements of the ideal man to express a weariness of the world and a desire to take Buddhist orders. Prince Genji, the hero of *The Tale of Genji*, is a good case in point.

92

Hidden by Reeds

[Episode 92](#) features a charming poem based on the metaphor of a small boat. Unable even to send a letter to the lady he loves, much less meet her, the hero returns home and writes a poem, comparing himself to a 'little boat / rowing back and forth' to no avail. The situation described is similar to that in [Episodes 4](#) and [65](#), in that it speaks of the man's disappointment over his love for an unattainable lady. Here the **Empress of the Second Avenue** is not mentioned explicitly, but the structural similarities between the stories suggest a connection.

The first two lines of the poem are found in a poem in the *Kokinshū* (no. 732), which compares the poet to a 'small boat without side boards' travelling to a lady's house. Because most contemporary readers would immediately recognize the familiar lines, this episode was probably composed in reference to that poem.

93

Love Between the Ranks

[Episode 93](#) is another example of a tale of the hero's love for a woman of higher rank. Other examples include [Episodes 4](#) and [5](#), where the lady beyond the hero's reach is the **Empress of the Second Avenue**, and [Episodes 69](#) and [73](#), where she is the **Priestess of Ise**.

The phrase 'rank beyond comparison' is a translation of *ninaki*, which describes a lady of the very highest rank. Though it is not stated directly, the implication is that she is the Empress of the Second Avenue. It is difficult to interpret the meaning of the words *ōna-ōna* at the beginning of the poem, but they are usually taken to mean 'according to one's position'.

The same poem also appears in the late tenth-century *Kokin waka rokujō* (Six Volumes of *Waka* Old and New; no. 3114).

Autumn Leaves and Spring Blossoms

Episode 94 depicts a female painter, which would have been a highly unusual subject for a story at the time; she is also remarkably detached and balanced in her attitude towards affairs of the heart. The hero parts ways with a lady who has borne him a child, though he is still in contact with her; he requests that she paint a picture for him, but as her current husband is present, the lady puts off doing the painting. The hero then sends her a sarcastic poem to criticize her failure to comply with his request, to which she replies.

In his poem, the hero likens the time he spent with the lady to the mists of spring and that with the new husband to the fogs of autumn. Meteorologically speaking, there is little difference between a mist and a fog, but since the Heian period the former has always been associated with spring and the latter with autumn. In her reply, the lady initially flatters her former husband, saying he is superior to the present one, but in the final part of the poem she likens the two men to autumn leaves and spring blossoms; both fall and scatter, suggesting that all men are the same and, whether leaf or blossom, they will leave her.

This poem appears in almost the same form in the late tenth-century *Kokin waka rokujō* (Six Volumes of *Waka* Old and New; no. 2875).

The Herd Boy's Star

Episode 95 is typical of the poem-tale (*uta monogatari*) genre. With reference to a well-known legend of ill-fated love, it contains a delightful balance of passion and humour, replacing an image of frustrated love with one of sexual gratification. The hero begs a lady to meet him, even if separated by a screen (see also **Episode 90**). He composes a poem while they converse (*monogatari nado shite*), and the lady is so moved by it that she permits him to push away the screen and pass the night in her company.

In his poem, the hero compares himself to the Herd Boy and the lady to the Weaving Maid of the **Tanabata legend** (see **Episodes 59** and **82**). In order to meet, the lovers must cross the Milky Way, and the image is humorously deployed in the poem, giving comic exaggeration to the minuscule distance presented by the screen in comparison with that of the Milky Way.

There are a handful of rather melodramatic episodes in the *Tales*, constituting an important component in the overall structure of the work, and this is one of them. (Episodes 6 and 24 are other examples.) Though clearly unrealistic, and written in an exaggerated style, this episode conveys all too well the desperation of love. A lady who has promised to meet her suitor in the autumn is taken away by her brother. She tells the hero what has happened in a poem, and the hero places a curse on her.

The poem, asserting that their relationship was fated to be shallow, is written on a maple leaf: just as the falling leaves fill the stream and make it shallow, so was their relationship. The word *e* (stream) is a pun (*kakekotoba*), which when read with the first letter of the particle *ni* creates *en* (bond/relationship), the sense translated here as ‘what was between us’.

In the final paragraph, the usual wry scepticism of the narrator comes through – ‘What a macabre thing to do! Do curses really affect those cursed?’ – counterbalancing the melodrama of the tale.

neither wood nor stone: This expression derives from lines of a poem by Bai Juyi (see [here](#)) in his *Baishi wenji* (Collected Works of Bai Juyi): ‘Men are not made of wood or stone; they all have feelings.’

around the middle of the last month of summer: Literally, ‘the middle of the sixth month’ in the **lunisolar calendar**, this was the hottest time of the year.

To this day: What makes the narrator’s comment here unusual is that it establishes a gap in time between the past and the present, as *ima koso wa mime* means ‘we will find out in the near future’, the only such instance in the *Tales*.

her suitor, gesturing with his hands, made a curse: The curse was made using a specific hand gesture (*ama no sakate o utsu*; literally, ‘heavenly reverse hand-clapping’). What exactly this means is unknown; the expression is also found in the *Kojiki* (see [here](#)), where it is described simply as a gesture made to curse a person.

The main feature of [Episode 97](#) is a wonderful poem based on the personification of old age. It is a celebratory poem composed by the hero (an ‘elderly captain’ – see the commentary to [Episode 87](#)) on the occasion of the fortieth birthday of Fujiwara no **Mototsune**, referred to here as the ‘Horikawa minister’, who was at the centre of court affairs for much of the ninth century. Mototsune also appears in

Episode 6. His biological father was Fujiwara Nagara, but he was adopted by Fujiwara no **Yoshifusa**, the head of the Fujiwara clan, in the mid ninth century. He became Minister of the **Right** in 872 and chancellor in 880. His main residence was in Horikawa, hence the name. In this episode, as in **Episode 81** and others, the hero is depicted as an elderly man (**okina**). Like other episodes of this kind, this one features a celebratory banquet.

Celebratory poems generally mention things that never change, employing symbols of youth and longevity, such as cranes, turtles, the pine and bamboo. This one, however, is unusual in that it refers to falling cherry blossoms, symbols of impermanence and hence death/decay, showing once more **Narihira**'s originality as a poet as it defied convention to use, in such a context, words with negative or opposing connotations. Here, cherry blossoms in the act of scattering impede the onset of old age, which itself marks the beginning of the process that leads to death/decay. Two negative images are brought together to create a positive, hence celebratory, one of great longevity. The effect of this paradoxical pairing is powerful and actually enhances the theme. Old age is personified in some poems in the **Kokinshū** and other works, but such examples are few.

This poem appears in the *Kokinshū* (no. 349), and this episode seems to have been built around it. Certain versions of the *Kokinshū* attribute the poem to Narihira's elder brother **Yukihira**, though in all probability Narihira was the author.

98

Blooms of Devotion

Episode 98 is another tale on the theme of fealty and devotion. In this case, the retainer presents a poem on his devotion, along with a pheasant attached to a sprig of artificial plum flowers, and receives a reward for it. The chancellor in question is thought to be Fujiwara no **Yoshifusa**, **Mototsune**'s adoptive father. He became chancellor in 857, in the second month of the **lunisolar calendar**, and retained that position until his death in 872 at the age of sixty-nine. It was a custom of the time to give presents with a sprig of a plant attached.

This poem praises the ever-blooming and unchanging artificial plum blossoms as a metaphor for the continued glory and prosperity of the chancellor. But, in addition to the flowers, the poem also includes a hidden word (**mono no na no uta**). The word for 'pheasant' (*kiji*) is hidden inside the verse *toki shimo*. Ancient *kana* orthography (see Appendix 4, [here](#)) does not distinguish between voiced and unvoiced consonants, so *kishi* may be read as either *kishi* or *kiji*. Typical of the kind of wordplay that permeates the *Tales*, this also shows how gifts

could be chosen to enhance poetic expression. The translation of the poem also contains hidden within the poem the letters for ‘pheasant’, shown in bold type.

This poem is included in the *Kokinshū* (no. 866), as an anonymous poem on an unknown topic. A note appended to the poem reads: ‘Some say it was written by the former minister’, i.e. Fujiwara no **Yoshifusa**. However, Katagiri argues that the poem is unlikely to have been written by such an individual and that the author would have been someone else, though Yoshifusa may have been the recipient of the poem.

99

A Glimpse or Not

Episode 99 depicts an exchange between the hero, **Narihira**, and a lady of whom he has caught but the slightest glimpse at an archery meet for the guards of the **Right** (whose duty was to protect the palace). The meet was held on the sixth day of the fifth month to demonstrate the men’s skills at mounted archery. It attracted many spectators. Ladies would remain inside their ox-drawn carriages, hidden behind long silk curtains hanging inside a bamboo screen. The man catches a glimpse (see *kaimami*) of the lady’s face through the curtain of the carriage pulled up next to his. Narihira is introduced here, as is often the case, by his title, ‘captain’, which designates him as second in command of the Inner Imperial Guard (see the commentary to **Episode 87**).

The first poem is unusual because of its subject matter – the hero questioning whether or not he saw the lady. The second poem is an invitation by the lady, telling him to let his feelings, not what he sees, be his guide. Her positive attitude towards love is typical of the *Tales*. The word *omoi* (spelled *omohi* at the time) was commonly used as a metaphor for the burning ‘fire’ of love.

The two poems are included in the *Kokinshū* (nos. 476 and 477) with a headnote similar to the opening section here. Whether they appeared first in the *Kokinshū* or in the *Tales* is unclear. A similar story also appears as part of Episode 166 in the *Yamato monogatari*.

100

Longing-Grass

Episode 100 is based on a play on symbols of remembering and forgetting. The hero is handed a sprig of ‘forgetting-grass’ from within the room of a high-ranking lady as he passes through the Koryoden Pavilion in the palace and replies with a poem. The Koryoden was

located west of the Seiryoden, the emperor's own residential quarters, and **imperial consorts** lived there. **Narihira** was probably passing along a kind of gallery connecting the two buildings. The lady, asking him if he was misidentifying 'forgetting-grass' as 'longing-grass', is really asking: 'Are you pretending to yearn for me, even though you have forgotten me?' In reply, the hero asserts that he is in fact a longing-grass and longs for her always.

Episode 162 in the *Yamato monogatari* is similar to this one but has a simplified and more streamlined narrative structure. Although in the *Yamato* version the same plant is known both as 'forgetting-grass' and 'longing-grass', they are in fact different plants (see *wasuregusa* (*forgetting-grass*) and *shinobugusa* (*longing-grass*)).

It is possible that the episode was written with the historical figures of the empress and Narihira in mind. The **Empress of the Second Avenue** was selected to participate in the Gosechi dance when she was a fifth-ranking lady of the chamber. This post usually meant that she would also become one of the lower-ranking imperial consorts in the service of the emperor. This would also mean that she most likely resided in the Koryoden until she became empress in 866.

101

Glorious Wisteria

The poem in [Episode 101](#) is ostensibly a song of praise, but it harbours within it a veiled criticism. **Narihira**'s elder brother, Ariwara no **Yukihira**, holds a party at his home in honour of the Middle Controller of the **Left** Fujiwara no **Masachika**. Narihira composes a poem about the wisteria spray displayed, praising the Fujiwara clan (Fujiwara puns with *fuji*, 'wisteria'; see also [Episode 80](#)). The shelter afforded by the wisteria bloom alludes to the splendour and might of the Fujiwara family. The lines 'Its bountiful shade / reaches further than ever' suggest that its power and authority are now greater than ever before. Though the poem eulogizes the glory of the Fujiwara clan and expresses gratitude for its patronage, there is implicit criticism of a power that keeps on spreading, like the shade of the wisteria, which is what prompts the questioning of those present.

102

Riding Upon Clouds

[Episode 102](#) comprises another poem in which the influence of Chinese thought, in this case Daoism, is apparent. The hero sends a poem to a relative who has become a nun, expressing his envy of the lady's renunciation of the world. The phrase 'ride upon clouds' is

based on tales of Daoist wizards and immortals flying through the air recounted in, among other sources, [chapter 1](#) of the central Daoist text *Zhuangzi*, entitled ‘Xiaoyao you’ (Free and Easy Wandering). The final comment by the narrator informs us that the lady in question was the **Priestess of Ise** (see [Episode 69](#)). Katagiri argues that this episode is written as a continuation of [Episode 69](#), the main tale regarding the priestess. See also [Episode 59](#), which depicts an amusing account of the hero’s own attempt to leave the secular world and live in seclusion.

103

A Fleeting Dream

The interest of the episode lies in the fact that though the poem is considered by many to be one of **Narihira**’s finest, the narrator appears to condemn it as ‘disappointing’. The poem and context are a reworking of a poem in the *Kokinshū* (no. 644). The final comment by the narrator is open to different interpretations: it can be read as a display of modesty by the hero-narrator or as tongue-in-cheek criticism of the hero-poet by a third person that is not meant to be taken at face value. As such, it is nothing more than veiled praise.

Fukakusa Emperor: A reference to **Emperor Ninmyō**, the name here relating to the location of his mausoleum in the Fukakusa District of Kyoto.

104

‘See-Weed’ and Winks, Not Winkles

Like the Aoi episode in the ninth chapter of *The Tale of Genji* and the Hatsuhana episode in the eighth chapter, *Eiga monogatari* (Tale of Flowering Fortunes), this tale depicts a taboo love exchange between a nun who has gone to see the colourful Kamo festival (see below) and a member of the nobility viewing the same proceedings. In the *Tales* the nobleman is the hero. A similar poem can be found in *Goshūi wakashū* (Later Collection of Gleanings; no. 1155), which in turn appears in the *Makura no sōshi* (Pillow Book; no. 80) by Sei Shōnagon (c.966–1017/1025).

The poem can be interpreted in two ways: as a satire on the lady’s misguided decision to become a nun, or as a somewhat bawdy joke – Takeoka’s interpretation – in the form of a love poem. The latter interpretation is probably the right one. There are a number of puns: *umi no / ama* can mean both ‘fisherwoman’ and ‘sorrowful nun’; *miru* means ‘to see’ and ‘seaweed’ (see *mirume*); and *mekuwasu* (in the form

mekuwaseyo) is both ‘to feed someone seaweed’ and ‘to communicate (invitingly) with a look’. This episode has much in common with [Episode 102](#) and was probably written as a continuation of it.

she adopted a nun’s garb: In the Japanese, the lady is described as being of ‘nondescript’ or ‘shabby appearance’ (*katashi yatsushitaredo*), indicating that she has been ordained and thus wears the plain robes of a nun.

Kamo festival: The Kamo festival takes place at the Kamo Shrine in Kyoto. Also known as the Aoi festival, it was the largest festival in the capital during the Heian period.

It is said that the lady was the former Priestess of Ise: A reference to the Priestess of Ise, Princess Yasuko – see [Episode 69](#).

105

Mister Dewdrop

[Episode 105](#) is a universally recognizable tale: a lady’s cruel behaviour causes a man to fall even more deeply in love with her. The episode is also noteworthy in that it depicts a lady whom the hero cannot meet, despite his efforts. The lady’s cold attitude towards the hero, despite his attempts to see her, is also depicted in [Episodes 25, 30, 32 and 34](#). In her poem, she compares the man to a dewdrop (see *tsuyu*), stating that as no one cares anything about him, he can go ahead and die if he wishes – a response that has the effect of making the hero fall even more deeply in love.

106

Dyeing Itself Red

[Episode 106](#) features a poem familiar to most Japanese from its inclusion in the *Hyakunin issyu*. The poem is written on the bank of the Tatsuta River when the hero is out strolling with some princes. The Tatsuta is a river in Nara Prefecture, and its environs are famous for viewing autumn leaves.

The poem, which also appears in the *Kokinshū* (no. 294, by **Narihira**), was originally created for a picture screen owned by the **Empress of the Second Avenue** and praised the empress for giving birth to a crown prince. It is thought that Narihira was the leader of a circle of poets who gathered at her palace, and he apparently composed the poem in her presence. The empress was known by the title ‘consort mother of the crown prince’ (see the commentary to [Episode 76](#)) between 869 and 876, when Narihira would have been between the ages of forty-five and fifty-two.

This episode creates a new fictional setting of a *Kokinshū* poem. Since in Japanese mythology the gods are the ancestors of the imperial house, it is appropriate for Narihira to refer to them in a poem that takes as its subject a painting on a screen belonging to the empress. The poem suits its new narrative setting here, too, because the people rambling along the banks of the Tatsuta River are imperial princes.

raging gods: The word *Chihayaburu* (raging) is a pillow word (*makura kotoba*) for ‘gods’ (*kami*). (See also [Episode 71](#).)

dyeing its own waters / autumnal reds: The word *karakurenai* (literally, ‘Chinese red’) is a bright scarlet dye that originally came from China and the Korean Peninsula, hence its name. The word *kukuru* means ‘tie-dying’ in particular. The appearance of large numbers of red autumn leaves floating on the surface of the river water is likened to cloth that has been dyed red using this technique. The poem expresses the poet’s delight at a scene so wonderful that even the gods of old could not have imagined it.

107

The Truth-Revealing Rain

[Episode 107](#) develops the ideal of elegant behaviour central to the *Tales*. The head of the house is depicted as being both kind and considerate, which he proves by writing poems on behalf of a young woman in his house (some commentators suggest it is a maid, others his younger sister) and sends them to Fujiwara no **Toshiyuki**, who is seeking her hand. It is such acts that exemplify the courtly refinement and sophistication (*miyabi* – see [here](#)) of the main characters and others in the *Tales*. This episode is similar to [Episode 41](#) but with the added elements of **gender mixing** and humour.

Not knowing that someone else has written on her behalf, Toshiyuki is deeply moved by what he reads and composes a poem in reply, lamenting the fact that he is unable to meet her. In the original Japanese, the word *nagame* is a pun (*kakekotoba*) meaning both ‘lost in thought’ and ‘continuous rain’. The expression ‘river of tears’ (*namidagawa*) is a hyperbole in a similar vein, referring to the copious tears shed by the unhappy lover.

The second poem, again written by the master of the house, skilfully parries Toshiyuki’s proposal. Maintaining the image of tears/falling rain that runs through all three poems in this episode, it captivates Toshiyuki, who goes on to win the girl. As was the custom of the time, the newly married couple did not live together at first; the husband visited his wife at night and returned to his own home the next

morning (see [here](#)). A letter arrives from Toshiyuki, saying he does not know whether he will make the visit, as it looks like rain. As before, the master of the house replies on her behalf, the poem containing a hidden and humorous reprimand for Toshiyuki's lack of steadfastness in the face of a bit of rain. The words *mi o shiru ame* means 'the rain that knows the outcome of one's fate'; the poem can be glossed as: 'If you don't come (just) because it is raining, you do not love me; if you come even if it is raining, you do love me.'

All three poems in this episode are included in the *Kokinshū* (nos. 617, 618 and 705), attributed to Toshiyuki (no. 617) and **Narihira** (nos. 618 and 705).

108

Crying Frogs

The main feature of [Episode 108](#) is a witty poem based on the comic image of crying frogs. A lady recites a poem that expresses how she is continually in tears because of a man's indifference towards her. Thinking that he is the subject of the poem, the hero attempts to vindicate himself in his reply. In his poem, he suggests that the lady's many lovers are like a field full of frogs; moreover, even though there is no rain, it is always filled with water because of the tears shed by the frogs. The crying of the frogs is like the many suitors weeping because of her coldness. (See also [Episode 27](#).)

The first of the two poems is by Ki no Tsurayuki (see [here](#)), appearing as no. 561 in his collected poems (*Tsurayuki-shū*). This is one of the later episodes to be added to the *Tales* and, with the one in [Episode 75](#), only one of two poems by Tsurayuki. [Episode 109](#) features a poem by his father, Ki no Mochiyuki.

109

First Mourned

[Episode 109](#) is based on the theme of friendship. The man sends a grief-filled poem to a close friend who has lost someone dear. This poem is included in the *Kokinshū* (no. 850), attributed to Ki no Mochiyuki, the father of Ki no Tsurayuki (see the commentary to the previous episode). The headnote states that it was 'composed on seeing blossoms that had bloomed only after the death of the person who planted them'. For more on friends and friendship, see in particular [Episodes 8–16](#) and [here](#).

Episode 110 features a wonderful poem based on the commonly held belief that intense feelings of love could cause one's spirit to leave the body and travel to one's beloved. Poems were often composed about such love-inspired transmigration. The hero entreats a lady he has been subconsciously visiting in his sleep to 'bind' his spirit, should she see it wandering in the night, with an incantation to make the spirit return to his body. Such 'spells', or incantatory songs, were known as *majinai uta*. There is some debate as to whether the hero is seriously suggesting that his spirit would leave his body to visit the lady or whether, in fact, he is speaking metaphorically. Katagiri favours the latter view, and I agree with him. On seeing the image of one's beloved, see also Episodes 21, 46, 54 and 63.

111

Coming Undone

Episode 111 is one of two episodes that feature the undersash (*shitahimo*), which secured a lady's undergarments, as the central image. The other one is Episode 37, where the image is used in a different way. According to Heian-period lore, when a woman was loved by someone, her undersash would loosen of its own accord.

The hero exchanges poems with a high-ranking lady 'under the pretence' of consoling her on someone's death, probably a relative of the lady or an attendant. This makes for a slightly odd combination of poems. In the first poem, the poet speaks of his love felt for a person he has not yet seen. While this could suggest the person who has just died, it actually alludes to the high-ranking lady. In the second poem, the lady replies that he could not really be in love with her, for her undersash has not even come undone. In his response to the second poem, the poet suggests that the undersash may soon loosen. It may seem strange to modern readers that mourning could be used as a means of courting, but sharing sadness, including in the exchange of poems, was regarded as an acceptable approach to love in the Heian period; there are also examples of it in *The Tale of Genji*.

112

Drifting Smoke

Episode 112 contains a poem that appears in both the *Kokinshū* (no. 708) and the preface to it, and is regarded as an important example of an 'allegorical poem'. Katagiri praises this episode highly because, although in the *Kokinshū* the poem has no headnote and the author is

given as unknown, in this episode the prose introduction works splendidly with the poem to create a wonderfully concise tale. The reason the episode ultimately succeeds so well is that the poem itself is exemplary.

In the poem, the hero laments the change of heart of a lady with whom he is in love. The ‘smoke from the salt-making fires’ refers to the process of boiling seawater to make salt. (See also [Episode 87](#).) Here it is a metaphor for the fires burning in the lady’s heart, with the smoke drifting towards a different lover entirely.

Suma: Suma (see [Map 1](#)) is part of present-day Kobe.

113

The Shortest Time

Many episodes in the *Tales* (such as nos. 21, 60, 62 and 112) concern a woman who has left a man, and that is also the theme of this episode, which can be seen as a continuation of [Episodes 111](#) and [112](#). The episode’s focus is the hero’s poem, in which he laments his lover’s change of heart. Some have suggested that the original poem is not about a woman who has changed her mind but, rather, about a parting caused by death. Both interpretations are possible.

114

The Crane’s Lament

[Episode 114](#) is another of the ‘venerable old man’ (*okina*) tales. It is important for two main reasons: it depicts the hero at an age when he feels too old to accompany the emperor (and so it is significantly placed in the last section of the *Tales*); and it shows the hero using his sleeve as an impromptu medium on which to write a poem. The other occasion on which **Narihira** writes on his robes is in the opening tale, in which the young hero, at the beginning of a life of great romance, dashes off a poem on a piece of his robe that he has torn off for the purpose. Here, he does so again, but in old age. This echo heightens the sense of pathos, as the hero writes once again on a piece of his robe, but this time on the theme of his own mortality.

The hero is taken along on a trip by **Emperor Koko** to Serikawa (in present-day Fushimi-ku, Kyoto; see [Map 3](#)); his role is to handle the hawks. The poem that he writes offends the emperor, who is also elderly and takes the poem as referring to himself. Emperor Koko visited Serikawa in the winter of 886, but at that time the historical Narihira was already dead. This is yet another of the anachronisms within this work that remind us that the tale was intended to be read

as fiction.

Emperor Saga went hunting at Serikawa during every twelfth month of the **lunisolar calendar**, beginning in 810. During the reigns of **Emperor Seiwa** (858–76) and **Emperor Yozei**, hunting with hawks was discontinued because of Buddhist scruples about killing living things. Emperor Koko then revived hunting at Serikawa, using hawks in the traditional way, like Emperor Saga. There is an account in the *Nihon sandai jitsuroku* (True History of Three Reigns) of the imperial progress to Serikawa, but this is a fictional version of it.

Though the poem is usually understood to be a lament – and has been interpreted as such here – it can also be read as a celebration of a special event. A crane is an auspicious symbol, and the word *naku* means ‘to sing’ as well as ‘to cry’. (See also commentary to [Episode 123](#).) This is the view of Katagiri, who asserts that in the poem Narihira is praising the revival of hawking.

This poem is also included in the *Gosenshū* (no. 1076), where it is attributed to Narihira’s elder brother, **Yukihira**. Yukihira was active after his brother’s death, until his own death in 893 at the age of seventy-six. This episode was probably reworked from this source around a central character who is assumed to be Narihira.

115

Burned by Live Coals

One feature of [Episode 115](#) is the clever wordplay on two place names in Michinoku (see below). A further point of interest is that, like [Episode 14](#), also set in Michinoku, it features a man who decides to leave for the capital. Other tales of farewell are [Episodes 44](#) and [48](#).

In the poem, the woman grieves at parting from the man, her words words ‘Being burned by live coals’ (*Oki-no-ite*) forming a pun on the place name ‘Oki-no-ite’. There is a second pun on ‘Island of the Capital’ (Miyakoshima), where the lady must stay – unlike the man, who can go to the real capital (*miyako*).

This poem is included in the *Kokinshū* (no. 1104), attributed to Ono no Komachi (see [here](#)), and this episode was presumably based on it.

116

Eaves on Waves

[Episode 116](#) is the last in the series depicting the journey to the east that began with [Episode 7](#). (See also commentary to [Episode 15](#).) It describes a man who has gone to Michinoku, where he composes a poem about being unable to see a lady at the capital for a very long time. At the time, Michinoku – also the setting for [Episodes 14](#) and

115 – was the province furthest from the capital.

The poem is a good example of how rhetorical ornamentation functions in *waka* (see [here](#) for further detail). The poem simply states that it has been a long time since the poet has seen his beloved, the first two lines serving as a preface (*jokotoba*) with the function both of embellishing ‘How long since’ (*hisashiku*) and evoking the remoteness of the setting – ‘a hut on a tiny island shore’ – to underline the isolation felt by the hero. In the translation I have repeated some lines to convey a sense of the exquisite rhythm of the original. The repetition of the *v* sounds of ‘waves’ and ‘eaves’ reinforces this rhythm.

A nearly identical poem is in the *Man'yōshū* (no. 2753), which suggests that the present episode was derived from it.

117

The Shrine of the Little Pine

This is an important episode for many reasons. First, it provides an excellent illustration of the connection between the imperial line and Shinto religion in the Heian period. Second, since ancient times the god of Sumiyoshi has been revered as the deity of Japanese poetry; this episode, centring as it does on an exchange of poems between the hero of the *Tales*, *Narihira*, a great poet himself, and the god of Sumiyoshi, probably played an important role in the later dissemination of this belief. Sumiyoshi has been used as a setting in many literary works, including the *Sumiyoshi monogatari* (Tale of Sumiyoshi) and [chapter 14](#) of *The Tale of Genji*, as well as being portrayed in art countless times. The exchange is also fascinating because it illustrates the belief that deities could appear at shrines and convey messages to humans.

Though it is not made clear in the text, the first poem is thought to have been composed by the hero. Ostensibly in praise of the ancient pine – the diminutive ‘Little Pine’ (*hime-matsu*) a poetic name for a fresh young tree – it is really an encomium to the longevity of the god/shrine.

The Sumiyoshi deity then appears to recite the second poem, which speaks of the close relationship, unbroken since ancient times, between the deity and the imperial house. ‘You’ (*kimi*) refers to the emperor. The word *shiranami* (literally, ‘do you not know?’) can be translated as ‘white waves’, with *nami* (waves) as an associative word (*engo*) for ‘water’. The word *mizūgaki* refers both to the sacred fence surrounding a shrine and to the shrine itself. Another example of metonymy (like the pine/god/shrine above), it also serves as a pillow word (*makura kotoba*) for *hisashiki* (‘since ancient times’). *Mizu* in

mizūgaki is also associated with water, but it carries more of the sense of ‘fresh and lovely’ (*mizumizu shi*), conveyed by the beautiful maritime setting: ‘on the white-waved shore’.

The first of the two poems is included in the *Kokinshū* (no. 905), topic and author unknown, and this episode was probably constructed around it.

Sumiyoshi Shrine: This is located in the present-day Sumiyoshi-ku, Osaka (see [Map 2](#)). Four deities are worshipped there: three sea gods and Jingu Kogo, regarded as an ancestor of the imperial house. Because of extensive land reclamation in the area, the shrine is now far from the sea, but originally it stood near the coastline, which was covered with beautiful pine trees.

118

Creeping Vine

The interest of [Episode 118](#) lies in the clever poem stating that a visit from an inconstant man holds no interest for the lady. The lines ‘as you crawl up / so very many trees’ (*hau ki*) liken the action of the vine creeping up a tree to the hero’s attempting to worm his way into the affections of many women. ‘Crawl’ (*hau*) was the actual verb used for men entering the rooms of ladies, so the metaphor is both witty and cutting, likening the hero to someone who creeps like a vine into the rooms of too many women. I had to repress the urge to title this episode ‘Creepy Vine’. (See also [Episode 36](#).)

This poem is included in the *Kokinshū* (no. 709), and the present episode is thought to be based on it. As Katagiri points out, this episode, like nos. 119, 120 and 122, are all striking in their depiction of strong female characters.

119

Keepsake Enemies

This is one of the rare episodes in which the woman is the central character and the tale is told from her perspective. Viewing the keepsakes left by a man who abandoned her, the lady composes a poem stating that, because these make her unable to forget her lover, they have become her ‘enemies’. Due to the conventions of classical orthography (*kana* – see [Appendix 4](#)), the word *ata* can be read as both *ada* (unfaithful) and *ata* (enemy), and the play on these two words adds considerable humour in the Japanese.

The poem appears as an anonymous poem in the *Kokinshū* (no. 746), and the present episode is thought to be based on it. See also

Festival of Pots

Episode 120 contains an amusing poem that also reveals the rather open attitude towards sexual matters in ancient Japan. On discovering that the lady to whom he is making advances is in a relationship with another man, the hero composes a poem that states how he will take revenge on her at the Tsukuma festival by counting the number of pots she is able to carry on her head to estimate the number of lovers she has had in the past.

This festival is associated with the Tsukuma Shrine, in Omi Province (see Map 2), located in the present-day city of Maibara in Shiga Prefecture. It is also known as the 'pot (*nabe*) festival' because every woman attending it was required to balance as many pots on her head as she had had lovers/husbands. The pots were then presented to the shrine as offerings. The poem is thought to be an old folk song, and the redeployment of it in this new narrative setting adds to the episode's humour.

Plum-Blossom Bonnet

Episode 121 contains an exchange that can be read as being between two men assuming male and female personae (see **gender mixing**). The hero composes a poem on seeing someone getting drenched by rain as he emerges from the Plum Pavilion. This was one of the buildings in the inner, residential section of the palace, named for the plum trees that grew in its garden. The **imperial consorts** and concubines resided here with their numerous ladies-in-waiting. The person emerging from the pavilion and getting wet in the rain is probably a nobleman quietly returning from a visit to the quarters of a lady-in-waiting.

In the first poem, the hero offers to lend a hat to the man to stop him getting wet. Though an imaginary object, the 'plum-blossom bonnet' provided poets with an elegant image for a real hat (see also *Kokinshū*, no. 1081). The word *omoi* in the second poem in its original spelling, *omohi*, was commonly used as a metaphor for burning passion because the last syllable of the word (*hi*) also means 'fire' (*hi*).

The text mentions only a 'person' (*hito*) emerging from the Plum Pavilion, so there is some debate as to the sex of the individual in question. Some critics believe that the exchange is between two men,

while others (Katagiri among them) argue that the person exiting the pavilion is actually a lady-in-waiting. According to Katagiri's interpretation, the robust response by the lady is appropriate because of the position this tale occupies in the *Tales* – near other episodes depicting strong female characters. This reading is possible, but the humour is intensified if we imagine the scene as taking place between two men playfully teasing each other by adopting the conventions of male-female exchanges. Moreover, as women spent most of their time indoors and men usually returned home before dawn to avoid being seen, it is more likely that the person braving the rain to leave unseen was indeed a man, and this is the view of Yamamoto. Readers are free to choose either or savour both interpretations.

122

Waters of Promise

Episode 122 is a depiction of the hero's rejection by a lady who has broken her promise to marry him. The poem uses complex rhetorical devices. The word *tanomi* means both 'to drink from one's hand' (*tanomi*) and 'to trust' (*tanomi*) someone. The first three lines of the poem act as a preface (*jokotoba*) to this word. The phrase *te ni musubi* means 'to scoop water in both hands', but also suggests *chigiri o musubi*, 'to make a pledge (of love) to each other'.

Yamashiro's Ide spring: The spring was located in the present-day town of Ide in Kyoto Prefecture. The Tama River flows there, with wordplay on its name in the word *tamamizu* (literally, 'waters of the Tama'), which also means 'gem-like water' or 'clear-water promise', as it appears in the translation.

123

Becoming a Quail

Episode 123 contains one of the most famous and moving of the poems in the *Tales*. The hero wearies of his relationship with a lady in a place known as Fukakusa (located in present-day Fushimi Ward, in Kyoto; see [Map 3](#)), then loses all desire to leave her after he receives her wonderful poem in reply to his.

In the first poem, the hero states that if he leaves the lady, the place where they are living will gradually become 'a plain of deep grasses' because there will be no one to flatten the grass with regular visits. The poem puns on the place name 'Fukakusa', which means 'deep grasses'. In her reply, the lady states that if the man leaves her, she will become a quail and cry out in the hope that he will visit her, even

if only when out hunting. The word *naki* means both ‘cry out’ or ‘sing’, as a quail would, and ‘weeping’ (see also [Episode 114](#)); the words *kari ni* mean both ‘briefly’ and ‘out hunting’. Moved by the beauty of the woman’s sentiment and her poetic skills, demonstrated through this wordplay, the hero changes his mind.

The two poems are included in the *Kokinshū* (nos. 971 and 972) as an exchange between Ariwara no **Narihira** and ‘someone’ (*hito*) as he prepares to leave Fukakusa. Commentators maintain that the ‘someone’ here was, in fact, a man living in Fukakusa. What comes over, between two men, as humorous banter is transformed in the *Tales* into a much more poignant exchange between a man and a woman.

A more literal translation of the first poem would read: ‘If I leave this village / where we’ve been together / for all these years, / it will indeed become / a plain deep in grass.’ I added ‘without my visits’ in my translation to help the modern reader, who would not be expected to know that husband and wife lived separately (see [here](#)) and what kept the grasses flat was the hero’s regular visits.

The episode and its poems are some of the most famous in the entire work. The prominent late-Heian poet Shunzei (see [here](#)) used them as the source material for one of his most famous poems (*Senzai wakashū*, no. 258):

As evening falls, I’m pierced through
by an autumn wind
blowing through the fields;
and in the deep grasses of Fukakusa,
the plaintive cry of a quail!

(*Yuu sare ba / nobe no akikaze / mi ni shimite / uzura naku nari / fukakusa no sato*)

124

Not a Soul ...

In the simple poem in [Episode 124](#), the hero bemoans the fact that there is no one with whom to share his thoughts. What makes the poem important, however, is its position just before the death poem in the last episode: placed thus, a somewhat insignificant poem is transformed into one of deep emotional impact.

Because the poem appears just before **Narihira**’s final poem, we are clearly meant to think of it as the hero’s musings as he looks back on his life. Again, in the characteristic style of the *Tales*, the narrator’s obfuscation of the significance of the episode with an ambiguous remark only deepens its emotional impact. Yamamoto argues that the episode has been deliberately placed here to create this effect, but

others claim that the poem actually loses its impact by being placed in such an obvious location as there is no longer any ambiguity. The former argument is more convincing: it is hard to believe that in a work in which such meticulous care and attention were put into arranging the episodes throughout, this one in particular would have been casually placed where it is.

125

This Day

[Episode 125](#) brings the *Tales* to a conclusion with the simple but magnificent death poem of the hero. It also forms a pair with [Episode 1](#), thus bestowing on all the intervening episodes a semblance of reality and historical veracity, as if we have been reading **Narihira**'s biography throughout.

In Japan, it was common to compose 'death poems' (*jisei no uta*); most have a Buddhist flavour and speak of the emptiness of the world, often as though composed from the standpoint of someone who has achieved enlightenment. This poem is an exception, in that it describes the hero's feelings just as they are, without any rhetorical embellishment. Through it, we can see the individuality of the central character of the *Tales* and of its model, Ariwara no Narihira.

This poem is also included in the ***Kokinshū*** (no. 861) as Narihira's death poem.

Appendix 1

Glossary of Literary and Social Conventions

***chi no namida* (tears of blood):** This expression derives from a folk belief that, in extreme grief, tears become mixed with blood. It was widely used figuratively to signify deep sorrow. It is believed to come from the Chinese story of Bian He, who cries tears of blood when he is wrongfully accused of having presented a fake piece of jade to the King of Chu. See [Episodes 40](#) and [69](#), among others.

crowing of the cock: In Heian romance, the crowing of the cock announces the dawn and the mandatory parting of lovers. The *Tales* contains several instances of the cock crowing, making it an important trope. In [Episode 14](#), for example, it is used to highlight the naivety of the countrywoman: the hero leaves before the cock crows, a show of rudeness that the woman blames on the cockerel rather than her heartless lover. In [Episode 53](#), by contrast, the hero laments the crowing of the cock, as he would like his encounter with the lady to go on much longer. The trope features in a similar way in [Episode 22](#).

***daisaku* (proxy composition):** When a person called on to produce a poem was unable or unwilling to do so, it was considered acceptable for someone else to write on their behalf. (See also **gender mixing** below.) This was often the case when a man wanted to send a proposal of marriage to a young lady. The poem would still be regarded as having been composed by the suitor, however, rather than by the actual poet. Narihira (see [here](#)) was a great poet, so it was natural that he should compose a poem on someone else's behalf. [Episode 107](#) is a humorous example of this practice.

***engo* (associative word(s)):** Clusters of semantically related words may be embedded within a poem and highlighted through punning or another rhetorical device to give supplementary meanings and as a show of verbal artistry intended to surprise and delight the reader. The poem about 'robes' in [Episode 9](#), for instance, while expressing longing for a distant partner, also contains numerous other words

related to clothing (see the [commentary](#)). In a similar vein, editors of poetry collections (*kashū*) would arrange poems in sequences so that they resonated lexically in some way, creating unified clusters of poems that were originally discrete.

gender mixing: In Heian-period Japan, it was not uncommon for a male courtier to adopt the persona of a woman when composing a poem. Poems were often composed on set topics (*dai*), sometimes from the perspective of a character in a painting, and wit and humour were highly appreciated. Proxy composition (*daisaku*) was also widely practised, and it was not uncommon for men to compose poems on a woman's behalf and vice versa. The ideal Heian man was, in fact, rather 'feminine' by the standards of later periods; for example, men were expected to cry (see *otoko naki* below). In *The Tale of Genji*, Genji's friends wish that he were a woman so that they might become lovers with him.

Gosenshū (*Gosen wakashū*; Later Collection of *Waka*): Usually shortened to *Gosenshū*, this collection, compiled in 951, is the second of the imperially commissioned *waka* anthologies. Compared to the *Kokinshū*, it features more poems by women and a much larger number of poetry exchanges (*zōtōka*). The prose headnotes (*kotobagaki*) are much longer and more elaborate, reflecting the literary preferences of the age.

Hyakunin isshu (One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each): A compilation of poems dating to 1230–40 by the renowned poet and scholar Fujiwara no Teika (see [here](#)). As well as being the best-loved and most widely read of all Japanese poetry collections, the *Hyakunin isshu* was also the first work of Japanese literature to be translated into English – by Frederick Victor Dickins in 1865. A collection of one hundred of the best poems, each by a representative poet, it provides a primer of the finest Japanese poetry from the late seventh to the early thirteenth centuries. Its influence on Japanese literature, culture and the visual arts is inestimable. Every major Japanese print (*ukiyo-e*) artist has illustrated the entire collection, while countless other works derived from it – paintings, commentaries, even a card game – have helped to maintain its popularity for centuries after its compilation.

imperial consorts: Women of high rank close to the emperor were known as *kisaki*. These included the empress, the mother of the emperor and the grandmother of an emperor. From the Nara period (710–94) onwards, the title *chūgū* was used for the empress, though what it actually signified is not clear. In the Heian period (794–1185), the word used at the time, *kōgō*, was virtually a synonym of 'empress'. This meant that the emperor could have two official consorts. In the year 1000, the regent, Fujiwara no Michinaga,

referred to his brother's daughter Teishi, who was the original consort of Emperor Ichijo (r. 986–1011), as *kōgō*, and his own daughter Shoshi as *chūgū*, when she became a consort of the emperor, thereby creating a system that allowed the emperor to have two official consorts, and this became the precedent. Offices were set up to administer the households of the *chūgū*, *kōgō* and *kōtaigō* (dowager consort, or mother of the reigning emperor), and ladies-in-waiting were appointed to them.

The emperor could take any number of secondary consorts – court officials of varying social status who looked after the needs of the emperor, which included producing heirs. These were known by the title of *nyōgo* (junior consort) or *kōi*, a lower-ranking lady of the chamber. The word *kōi* (distinct from *koi*, meaning 'love') – literally, 'clothes changer' – is generally translated as 'concubine' or 'wife'.

jokotoba (preface): The initial segment of a poem serving as a 'preface' to a word introduced later in the poem, to which it is linked via homophony or metaphor. The preface is often unrelated semantically to the content of the main part of the poem, giving rise to two distinct layers of meaning within the same short poem. An example can be found in the third poem of [Episode 23](#). The first two lines, 'As the wild winds blow / and the white waves rise' (*Kaze fukeba / oki tsu shiranami*), serve as a preface for *tatsu* (to rise) as it appears in the fourth line within *Tatsuta-yama* or Mount Tatsuta. The *jokotoba* is similar to the *makura kotoba* in that it serves to embellish and introduce a word, but tends to be longer, extending for at least two lines in translation.

kaimami (glimpsing): The excitement and eroticism of unexpectedly catching a glimpse of a beautiful lady formed a central motif in Heian-tale literature. Elite women were expected to conceal themselves from view, so for a man to catch a glimpse of a lady was considered a lucky circumstance. In some cases, the glimpsing is intentional and deliberate ([Episode 23](#)), but usually it is accidental ([Episode 1](#)). A woman may occasionally catch a glimpse of a man ([Episode 63](#)), but the reverse situation is more common. The famous scene in [Episode 1](#) of the *Tales*, which sets the tone for the entire work, marks the first appearance in Japanese literature of *kaimami*. It is a measure of the influence of the *Tales* on subsequent works, from *The Tale of Genji* onwards, that the hero's romantic liaisons almost always begin with such unanticipated glimpsing.

kakekotoba ((literary) pun): Various defined in dictionaries of classical Japanese poetry, this term is most commonly taken to mean a form of punning, but whereas a straightforward pun – equivalent to the word *dajare* in modern Japanese – might be viewed as light-hearted and comical and a rather low-grade form of

verbal play, the *kakekotoba* in classical Japanese poetry was used to display the highest level of verbal and poetic artistry. That said, there are cases where the punning can be quite humorous, light or even mildly bawdy.

The device does function primarily as a pun, but one that may operate on many levels. Though sometimes the pun can be conveyed by a single word, in many cases it can apply to several lines, so that a string of words or phrases may be punned together. Thus it is possible for several lines of a *waka* poem to give two completely different readings, one that provides the basic message of the poet and the other a form of highly refined verbal decoration often depicting a visual image. This second reading might be related to the main message or it might be a separate pun, or series of puns, with a purely decorative function. The intention was to create a multi-layered effect of great complexity in order to convey the depth and refinement of the poet's emotion. The Japanese language has many homophones and similar-sounding words, which makes such complicated punning possible – wordplay of a kind that would be extremely difficult to simulate in English – and Heian poets deployed the *kakekotoba* to full effect in their verse. For a striking example, see the [commentary](#) on the first poem in [Episode 9](#).

The standard English translation of the term is 'pivot word(s)', i.e. something that may be read as the continuation of what precedes it or as the beginning of what follows, producing two different readings. However, while pivot words are a form of pun, they perform that function in a very specific way, one that does not convey the full sense of *kakekotoba*, so the standard translation is misleading. Translated literally, *kakekotoba* gives 'overlapping of words' – effectively punning – but most non-Japanese scholars of classical Japanese studiously avoid using 'pun' as a translation, chiefly because of the traditional view of the pun as being low-class. However, given that *kakekotoba* tends to be defined in Japanese dictionaries with little or no reference to the way in which it may function as a pivot word, the current standard translation of *kakekotoba* as 'pivot word(s)' deserves rectification.

By contrast, Japanese scholars interpret *kakekotoba* in its broader sense of '(literary) pun', seeing the pivoting function as just one aspect of this, usually in relation to other rhetorical devices, such as *jokotoba* and *engo* (see above), that may be at work in a poem. The commentary to [Episode 57](#) provides an example of how a *kakekotoba*, functioning as a pivot word, works in tandem with a *jokotoba*.

I have chosen to use '(literary) pun' as the translation, but another option would be not to translate the word at all as in the

case, for example, of *waka*, *haiku*, etc. It is an extremely complex term that has seen a wide variety of usage over a long period of time. It should be noted, too, that many of the terms used to describe rhetorical devices were not coined until the Meiji period (1868–1912) and then applied to classical *waka* poetry, which do not always fit neatly within the definitions given to them.

***kinuginu no uta* ('morning-after' poem):** Custom demanded that courtiers send a poem to their beloved after a night spent in their company – known as a 'morning-after' poem. The word *kinuginu* is the plural of the word for clothes, *kinu*. Courtiers of the time used the clothes they wore during the day as bedding at night; a couple would use their combined clothing. In the morning, they put on their clothes again before parting, leading to the phrase *kinuginu no wakare*, to describe their parting (*wakare*) in the morning, and the poem (*uta*) that expressed their grief at parting as *kinuginu no uta*.

***Kokinshū* (*Kokin wakashū*; *Collection of Waka Old and New*):**

Usually shortened to *Kokinshū*, this was the first imperially ordered anthology of native poetry in Japan. In 905 Emperor Daigo gave the order for its compilation to the poets Ki no Tomonori, Ki no Tsurayuki (who was the principal author – see [here](#)), Oshikochi no Mitsune and Mibu no Tadamine. The *Kokinshū* features many poems dating from the ninth century, including poems by Ariwara no Narihira (see [here](#)). (See the Introduction, [here](#), for further detail; see also *waka*.)

***kotohogo* (celebrating in poems):** This term refers to words of felicitation, particularly in the form of a poem, given either after an auspicious event or before it, in the hope of bringing it about. Auspicious poems were often composed by an old man (*okina*), one of the numerous personae assumed by Narihira (see [here](#)) in the *Tales*. In ancient Japan, because it was believed that words contained spirits and thus were sacred, uttering celebratory words was thought to have the power to bring about fortuitous events, just as uttering words of misfortune could lead to misfortune. Such a belief was known as *kotodama shinko*.

***koto no ha* (leaves of words):** Whereas *kotoba* (word(s)) refers to language in general, the more poetic *koto no ha* seems to refer almost exclusively to poetry and poetic language throughout the Heian period. The expression incorporates a pun on the last syllable of *kotoba* and *ba* (or *ha*), meaning 'leaves', yielding 'leaves of words'.

Left and Right: In accordance with the *ritsuryō* code – a system dating to the late sixth century that was based on Confucianism and Chinese Legalism in Japan – all government posts were divided into the left and the right and the left was always superior. The Minister

of the Left served as the senior minister of state and the Minister of the Right served as his deputy to the Minister of the Left. Lower ranks such as equerries were also divided into left and right, as were units within the Imperial Guard. These left and right divisions have nothing to do with contemporary associations such as right or left wing. For the division of the capital into left/right – which was of course also related to the *ritsuryō* code – see the [commentary](#) to [Episode 2](#).

lunisolar calendar: The ancient Japanese imported from China a modified lunar (lunisolar) calendar consisting of twelve months of twenty-nine or thirty days. As in the Gregorian calendar, each season consisted of three months, though the New Year began in what would be February, roughly a month to a month and a half later than the Gregorian calendar. In the translation, specific months are not named; instead, just the season is given, preceded by ‘early’, ‘mid’ or ‘late’, as appropriate. The twelve-month sequence is as follows: (1) New Year; (2) mid spring; (3) late spring; (4) early summer; (5) midsummer; (6) late summer; (7) early autumn; (8) mid autumn; (9) late autumn; (10) early winter; (11) midwinter; (12) late winter.

makura kotoba* (pillow word(s)):** These are epithets used in conjunction with certain words as conventional embellishments, forming a ‘pillow’ for the word in question. Examples include *chihayaburu* (raging) for *kami* (the gods); *shirotae no* (of white cloth or hemp) for *sode* (sleeves); and *hisakata no* (far distant) for *sora* (sky), *kumo* (clouds) and *tsuki* (moon). The meaning of many of the most ancient pillow words has been lost or is unclear, making their translation problematic. Many ‘newer’ words were created in the time of the eighth-century ***Man’yōshū, but they are less obscure because their connection with the words they introduce – sound repetition or metaphor – is more obvious. Though particularly common in poems of the *Man’yōshū* and other early writings, pillow words continued to be used throughout *waka*’s long history for their archaic resonance.

***Man’yōshū* (Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves):** This is the earliest surviving collection of Japanese poetry. The last datable poem was composed in 759 while the earliest poems go back to at least the early sixth century. It is believed to have been compiled over many decades by numerous people, although the details of the process remain uncertain. The final collection of twenty volumes and over 4,500 poems is believed to have been compiled by the poet Otomo no Yakamochi (c.718–85). Several poems in the *Tales* were taken from, or are based on, poems in the *Man’yōshū*.

***mirume* (*Codium fragile*):** An edible type of seaweed that resembles

small pine trees (the characters used to write it mean ‘pine of the sea’), it was widely used in love poetry because its name puns with ‘eyes that see’, as in seeing or meeting one’s beloved. At the time, the verb *miru*, meaning ‘to see’ or ‘to meet’, was synonymous with ‘to make love’ as the first time they saw each other was when the man entered the woman’s room secretly to make love to her. See also the commentary to [Episodes 25, 75 and 104](#).

monogatarau: This is a verbal form of the noun *monogatari*, which means ‘tale’, as in the title of this work, *Ise monogatari – The Tales of Ise*. Used in several of the episodes (in varying forms – *uchi-monogatarau*, *monogatari nado suru*, *monogatarisu* and *katarau*), the term is one of the most ambiguous in the *Tales*. Depending on the context, its meaning can vary from ‘conversation’ to ‘talk after lovemaking’ or even, as some suggest, lovemaking itself. See the commentary on [Episodes 2, 53, 69 and 75](#) for further discussion.

mono no na no uta (poem with a hidden word): Literally ‘name of something poem’, this term describes a poem in which parts of the words form an acrostic. See [Episodes 9 and 98](#), which each feature a poem of this genre, and the pun on seaweed in [Episode 3](#).

muma no hanamuke (pointing the nose of the horse in the right direction): An expression of parting that derives from the old ritual of pointing a horse’s nose in the direction of one’s destination as a gesture of farewell before a journey. Several episodes depict the farewells of dear friends, in which a party is usually held and poems are recited. [Episodes 44 and 48](#) are typical examples.

Noh: A major form of Japanese musical drama, Noh has been performed since the fourteenth century, and is still regularly performed today. Traditionally, a Noh programme includes five plays with comic interludes (*kyōgen*); an *okina* Noh play, centred on a venerable old man and hence usually celebratory (see next entry), may be presented in the very beginning, especially at New Year and on other special occasions. Noh plays may be based on classic works of literature, such as the *Kokinshū*, *The Tales of Ise* and *The Tale of Genji*. Much of the pleasure of the plays derives from the poetic language sung in a rhythmic style and the many literary allusions.

okina (venerable old man): In Heian culture, the ‘venerable old man’ had a common role to deliver blessings (see *kotohogu* above), celebrate long life, pray for longevity, tell tales and recall with longing the lost elegance of former great families and times. The concept is very important within the *Tales* and around ten episodes employ the device of the venerable old man. Even when the words ‘old man’ are not used explicitly, the narratorial interventions in the text appear to be those of an elderly man. See [Episodes 1, 40, 76, 77, 79, 81, 82, 83, 97 and 114](#).

Some commentators argue that the elderly man in the *Tales* appearing to be telling stories ‘now’ is in fact recounting events that took place ‘long ago’. In other words, an old man is telling tales based on his own past, which would mean that the narrator of the *Tales* is in fact Narihira as an old man, but this view is not universally accepted. Other scholars maintain that the ‘old man’ should be seen as a personified deity in a blessing rite, as in the later medieval **Noh** play *Okina* (a play in the sub-genre of *okina* Noh plays), but no other such examples have been located in Heian-period texts.

omoi or omohi (thoughts or feelings, especially of love): The word *omoi*, originally spelled *omohi*, was commonly used in classical poetry because the last syllable of the word puns with *hi* (fire), so it could signify burning passion. Many love poems of the period compare the poet’s burning passion with the molten peaks of either Mount Fuji or Mount Asama, as two of the most active volcanoes in Japan. See [Episodes 99](#) and [121](#) for poems employing *omoi*.

otoko naki (crying of men): In contrast to the stoic image of the ideal male in the West, the ability of the Heian nobleman to show emotion through tears was expected, if not required. Someone unable to weep when appropriate would have been seen as unfeeling. Whereas women wept quietly, modestly hiding their faces with a sleeve, men usually vented their despair loudly, shedding great tears. ‘Man-crying’ remained common until the Meiji period (1868–1912), when it became the norm not to cry in public. In the *Tales*, men cry frequently; women not at all.

poetic exchanges between men: It is not unusual in the *Tales* to find men exchanging poems. Influenced by the Chinese poet Bai Juyi, the *Tales* was the first work of Japanese literature to focus on male friendship (see the Introduction, [here](#), for more on this). Sometimes the poems are in the form of humorous exchanges between men acting as if they are lovers, and sometimes a man may adopt a woman’s role (see also **gender mixing** above). See [Episodes 11](#), [16](#), [17](#), [38](#), [44](#), [46](#) and [48](#).

Right: See **Left and Right**.

sangatsujin (the last day of spring): Following in the footsteps of the Chinese poets before them, the Japanese of the Heian period called the last day of the third month of the **lunisolar calendar** ‘the last day of spring’ (*sangatsujin*) and mourned its passing for it symbolized the impermanence of life. The Chinese poet Bai Juyi, who had an enormous influence on both the *Tales* and Japanese literature as a whole (see [here](#)), loved the spring and wrote a large number of poems on the theme of regret at its passing. See [Episodes 77](#) (which has an unusual rendering of this theme), [80](#), [83](#) and [91](#),

among others.

Shūishū (Shūi wakashū; Gleanings of Japanese Poetry): This collection, the third of the official *waka* anthologies (*chokusenshū*), was compiled by Fujiwara no Kinto (see [here](#)) and Emperor Kazan at the beginning of the eleventh century.

The Tale of Genji (Genji monogatari): Written in the early years of the eleventh century at the height of the Heian period, this is the most famous novel in Japanese literature. The author was Murasaki Shikibu (970/978–1014/1031), a noblewoman and lady-in-waiting, who beautifully depicts the lifestyle of the courtiers of her day. The novel focuses on the romantic life of its central character, Hikaru Genji or ‘Shining Genji’, while shedding a fascinating light on the customs and mores of aristocratic society of the time. In [chapter 2](#), for instance, the hero and his male friends discuss women and marriage in an exchange that can be thought of as a sort of Heian-man’s guide to dating and courtship. There are many similarities between the *Tales* and *The Tale of Genji*; indeed, it has been argued that, without the *Tales*, the latter work would have been inconceivable.

tama no o (string of gems): The image of a string of gems – pearls or other jewels strung together in a necklace or bracelet – was widely employed in Japanese literature of the Heian period as a metaphor for both a short and a long interval of time. How it came to signify a brief or long interval of time is unclear, though the former may refer to the small length of thread visible between the gems, and the latter to the entire string.

Tanabata legend and festival: Originating in China, the Tanabata legend has been popular in Japan since the earliest times and is celebrated each year in the form of a festival with the same name. Many poems have been written on this theme, from the *Man’yōshū* onwards. According to the legend, the Weaving Maid (the star Vega) can meet her lover, the Herd Boy (the star Altair), only once a year, on the seventh day of the seventh month of the **lunisolar calendar** – the day on which the festival was held (now 7 July). In order to meet, the two lovers must cross the Milky Way. Witty and amusing adaptations of the legend appear in [Episodes 59](#), [82](#) and [95](#).

tsuyu (dew): In classical Japanese poetry, dew was commonly used as a symbol of evanescence or conflated with tears. See [Episodes 6](#), [50](#), [54](#), [56](#) and [59](#), among others.

uta monogatari (poem tales): Discussing poems and their authors was known as *utagatari*. In tightly knit Heian aristocratic society, who had sent which poem to whom, or who had created a great impression by reciting a poem, was frequently the subject of

conversation and gossip. Stories would arise based on such *utagatari* and these in turn evolved into poem tales (*uta monogatari*). The *Tales* is very likely to have started life as a collection of stories of this kind. However, the *Tales* takes the genre to a vastly superior level, transforming it into literary fiction.

waka: Poems of thirty-one syllables arranged in five lines in an alternating pattern of 5-7-5-7-7 syllables. The term *waka* also serves as a general term for classical Japanese poetry in all its forms – except *renga* (linked verse) and *haiku* – as opposed to foreign verse, especially Chinese poetry. In the more usual restricted sense, it designates Japanese poetic forms predating *renga* and *haiku*, namely *chōka*, *sedōka* and especially the thirty-one-syllable *tanka*, which is often synonymous with *waka*. In the *Tales*, *waka* are referred to as *uta* (songs). Since the Meiji period (1868–1912), the ancient term *tanka* has been revived and the form updated, replacing *waka* as the term for poems in the classical thirty-one-syllable form. (See also the Introduction, [here](#).)

wasuregusa (forgetting-grass) and shinobugusa (longing-grass):

These were widely referred to in poetry when reminiscing about happier times or lamenting the cruelty of an estranged lover. Although both plants are referred to as a type of ‘grass’, they are not actually grass: ‘forgetting-grass’ (*wasuregusa*) is an old name for the day lily (*kanso*), and ‘longing-grass’ (*shinobugusa*) is a kind of fern. There was a belief that if one planted the forgetting-grass it would help one forget an ex-lover, although courtiers were unlikely to have planted it in reality. The ‘forgetting-grass’ appears in [Episodes 21, 31 and 100](#), ‘longing-grass’ in [Episode 100](#).

Yamato monogatari (Tales of Yamato): This loosely structured collection compiled around 951 comprises vignettes centring on poets and poetic exchanges. More disjointed than the *Tales*, it provides a record of court life in the early decades of the tenth century.

Appendix 2

Historical Characters

The following are those characters in the *Tales* that are based on historical figures rather than being purely fictional. Some of them may be referred to by more than one name. For example, an emperor would often acquire a new name after he died, based on the location of his mausoleum, hence ‘Mizunoo Emperor’. An empress might be referred to by the location in which she lived, hence ‘Empress of the Fifth Avenue’. For the significance of ‘Left’ and ‘Right’, see the glossary ([here](#)). See also ‘Appendix 3: Genealogies of the Historical Characters’ ([here](#)).

Aritsune (Ki no)	(815–77). A member of the Ki clan, one of the families that lost influence at court due to the rise of the Fujiwara in the ninth century (see commentary to Episode 16). Narihira ’s father-in-law. His sister Shizuko (d. 866) was a consort of Emperor Montoku and the mother of his firstborn, Prince Koretaka , and Princess Yasuko (later the Priestess of Ise).
Aritsune’s daughter Emperor Junna	Narihira ’s wife. Her name is not known. (786–840, r. 823–33). The Emperor of the Western Pavilion; father of Princess Takaiko .
Emperor Koko	(also known as Ninna; 830–87; r. 884–7). Great-uncle of Emperor Ninmyo ; he replaced Emperor Yozei . A highly cultivated man, he restored many ancient court rituals and ceremonies, one example of which was the hawking in Serikawa (see Episode 114).
Emperor Montoku	(827–58, r. 850–58). The Tamura Emperor. Son of Emperor Ninmyo and Fujiwara no Junshi, the Empress of the Fifth Avenue . Father of Prince Koretaka and the Emperor Seiwa .
Emperor Ninmyo	(808–50, r. 833–50). The Fukakusa Emperor. Son of Emperor Saga (r. 809–

Emperor Seiwa	23) and Tachibana no Kachiko. (850–78, r. 858–76). The Mizunoo Emperor. Son of Emperor Montoku , father of Emperor Yozei . The son of Yoshifusa 's daughter, the Somedono Empress , he replaced her firstborn son, Prince Koretaka , and ascended the throne at the tender age of eight, with his grandfather, Yoshifusa, as regent.
Emperor Yozei	(868–949; r. 876–84). Son of Emperor Seiwa and the Empress of the Second Avenue , he was removed from the throne by Mototsune and replaced by his great-uncle Emperor Koko .
Empress of the Fifth Avenue	Fujiwara no Junshi (809–71). Consort of Emperor Ninmyo and mother of Emperor Montoku .
Empress of the Second Avenue	Fujiwara no Takaiko (842–910). Sister of Mototsune and Kunitsune . Became consort of Emperor Seiwa in 866; mother of Emperor Yozei .
Itaru (Minamoto no)	A noble of the Heian period, chiefly known as the grandfather of Minamoto no Shitago .
Kunitsune (Fujiwara no)	(828–908). Older brother of Takaiko, Empress of the Second Avenue .
Masachika (Fujiwara no)	(823–75). A member of the Ceremonial Branch of the Fujiwara clan.
Mototsune (Fujiwara no)	(836–91). Older brother of Takaiko, Empress of the Second Avenue ; the Horikawa minister. Regent under Emperor Yozei and again under Emperor Koko .
Narihira (Ariwara no)	(825–80). The hero of the <i>Tales</i> . One of the finest poets of his generation. Despite his imperial blood – he was the grandson of two emperors – he never reached positions of importance at court. Because of his consummate poetic skills and devotion to the way of love, he was celebrated as the ideal lover of the period. (See the Introduction, 'Depicting the Hero', here , for more about him.)
Priestess of Ise	Yasuko (or Tenshi; c.848–913). Daughter of Shizuko and Emperor Montoku and youngest sister of Prince Koretaka . She became priestess in 859, went to Ise in 861 and remained in office until 876.
Prince Kaya	(794–871). The seventh son of the Emperor Kanmu (r. 781–806), he was the uncle of Narihira on his mother's side and his great-uncle on his father's.
Prince Koretaka	(844–897). First son of Emperor

Prince Saneyasu

Princess Ito

Princess Takaiko

Shitago (Minamoto no)

Somedono Empress

Takakiko (Fujiwara no)

Toru (Minamoto no)

Toshiyuki (Fujiwara no)

Tsuneyuki (Fujiwara no)

Yoshifusa (Fujiwara no)

Yoshimi (Fujiwara no)

Yukihira (Ariwara no)

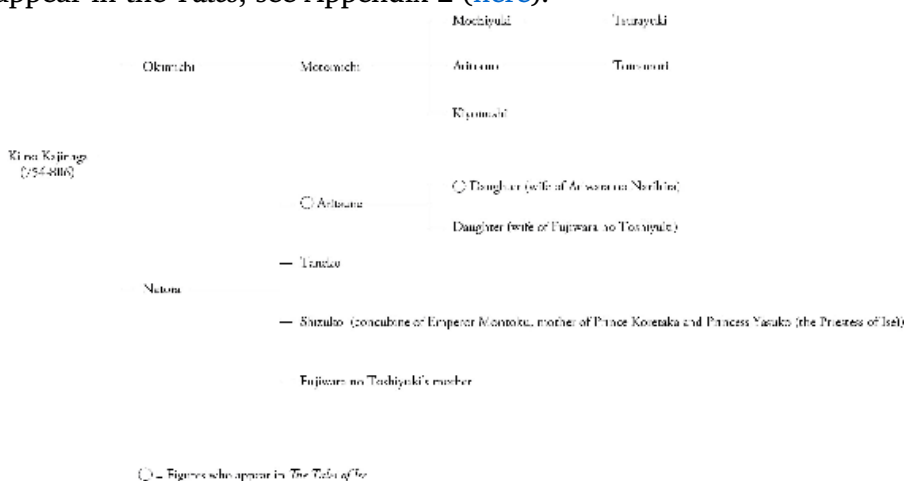
Montoku and nephew of **Aritsune**. Likely heir to the throne until his half-brother Korehito (**Emperor Seiwa**) was named crown prince just months after his birth. Ordained as a Buddhist priest in 872. (831–72). The ‘cloistered prince’, a son of **Emperor Ninmyo** with the same mother as **Emperor Koko**. He excelled at the *biwa* lute. Suffering from illness, he took Buddhist vows in 859. (?–861). A daughter of Emperor Kanmu (r. 781–806), she was the wife of Prince Abo and mother of **Narihira**. (See also the Introduction, [here](#).) (d. 848). The daughter of **Emperor Junna**, she died at the age of eighteen. (911–83). One of the compilers of the *Gosenshū* (see [here](#)). Fujiwara no Akirakeiko (829–900). Daughter of **Yoshifusa**. Consort of **Emperor Montoku** and mother of **Emperor Seiwa**. (d. 858). A consort of **Emperor Montoku**, she was the daughter of **Yoshimi** and the cousin of both the **Empress of the Second Avenue** and the **Somedono Empress**. (822–95). The Riverside Minister of the Left; a courtier known for his magnificent palaces and exquisite taste. The son of Emperor Saga (r. 809–23), he was considered by many to have been one of the models for Genji in *The Tale of Genji* (see [here](#)). (See also the Introduction, [here](#).) (d. 907?). Member of the southern branch of the Fujiwara. A fine poet and one of the most famous calligraphers of the Heian Period. **Narihira**’s brother-in-law. (836–75). Eldest son of the Minister of the Right, **Yoshimi**. (804–872). Head of the northern branch of the Fujiwara family and an early architect of the clan’s success. Father of Akirakeiko, the **Somedono Empress**. First commoner to hold office of chancellor, regent to **Emperor Seiwa**. (813–867). A once-powerful member of the Fujiwara who eventually lost most of his political influence. Father of **Takakiko**. (818–93). **Narihira**’s older brother and also a distinguished poet. The first son of

Prince Abo. He rose high in the court hierarchy, despite his father's exile following the events known as the Kusuko incident (see [here](#)).

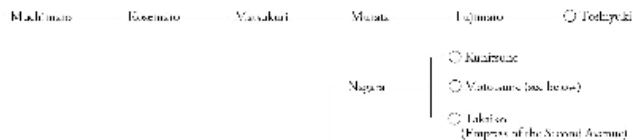
Appendix 3

Genealogies of the Historical Characters

Overleaf is a family tree for each of the two noble clans that appear in the *Tales*, the Ki and the Fujiwara, followed by a genealogy of the imperial family. For further details on the historical figures that appear in the *Tales*, see Appendix 2 ([here](#)).



Southern Branch

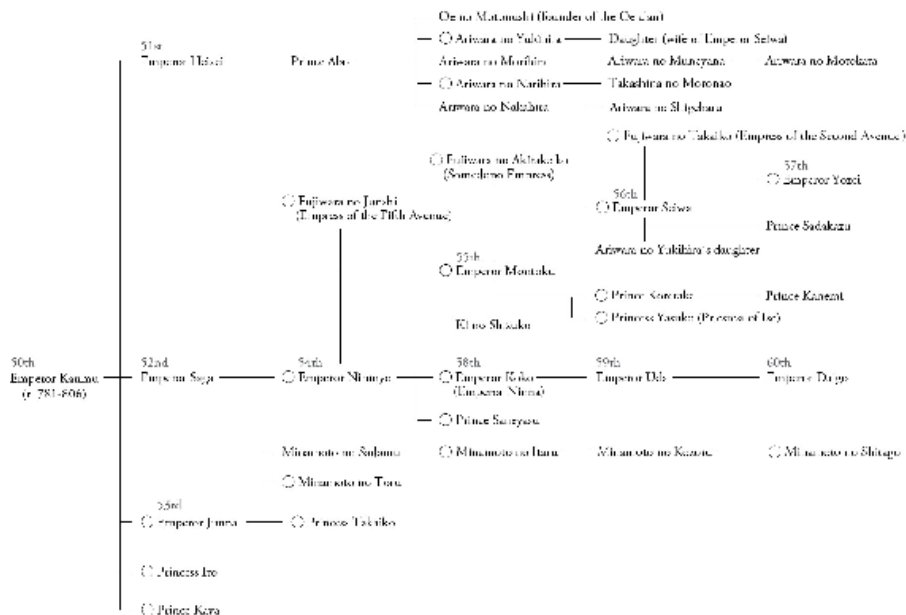


Northern Branch



Ceasational Branch





Appendix 4

Principles of Romanization

For the *Tales*, historical *kana* usage is brought into conformity with modern pronunciation as far as possible, based on the Hepburn system of romanization. *Kana* is a phonetic lettering system. With a few minor exceptions, each sound in the Japanese language is represented by one character. Ancient *kana* orthography does not distinguish between voiced and unvoiced consonants, and many of the poems in the *Tales* take advantage of this to create puns and verbal play – see the commentary to [Episodes 98](#) and [119](#), for instance. The examples of syllables listed below are taken from a standard table. Only proper nouns are capitalized (see ‘Musashino’ below) and the word at the beginning of each poem.

H column (ハ行) syllables are rendered *wa*, *u*, *i*, *e* and *o* when they do not come at the beginning of a word:

あは→*awa*
あふ→*au*
あひ→*ai*
あへ→*ae*
あほ→*ao*

W column (ワ行) syllables are rendered *wa*, *i*, *e* and *o*:

われ→*ware*
うゐ→*ui*
ゑひ→*ei*
あを→*ao*

Mu (ム) is rendered *n* when used as a suffix:

あらむ→*aran*

Particles are rendered as follows:

は→wa
へ→e
を→o
なむ→nan

When historical *kana* usage diverges from standard modern pronunciation, macrons are used to represent long vowels:

あふぎ (扇) →o-gi
けふ (今日) →kyo-

Parts of speech (verbs, particles, nouns, etc.) are as a rule separated by spaces, as in this example from [Episode 12](#):

むさしのは
けふはなやきそ
わかくさの
つまもこもれり
われもこもれり

Musashino wa
kyō wa na yaki so
wakakusa no
tsuma mo komoreri
ware mo komoreri

Appendix 5

Romanized Transliterations of the Poems

For the principles of romanization used here, see Appendix 4 ([here](#)).

1. Coming of Age

a.

Kasugano no
wakamurasaki no
surigoromo
shinobu no midare
kagiri shirarezu

b.

Michinoku no
Shinobu-mojizuri
tare yue ni
midare-somenishi
ware-naranakuni

2. Endless Rains

Oki mo sezu
ne mo sede yoru o
akashite wa
haru no mono tote
nagame kurashitsu

3. A Gift of Seaweed

Omoi araba
mugura no yado ni
ne mo shinan
hijiki-mono ni wa
sode o shitsutsu mo

4. The Spring of Old

Tsuki ya aranu

haru ya mukashi no
haru naranu
waga mi hitotsu wa
moto no mi ni shite

5. Nod Off to Sleep

Hito shirenu
waga kayoiji no
sekimori wa
yoi-yoi goto ni
uchi mo nenanan

6. Pearls of Dew

Shiratama ka
nani zo to hito no
toishi toki
tsuyu to kotaete
kienamashi mono-o

7. The Returning Waves

Itodoshiku
sugiyuku kata no
koishiki ni
urayamashiku mo
kaeru nami kana

8. Mount Asama's Peak

Shinano naru
Asama no take ni
tatsu keburu
ochikochi-bito no
mi yawa togamenu

9. Departing for the East

a.

KAra-goromo
KItsutsu narenishi
TSUma shi areba
BArūbaru kinuru
TAbi o shi zo omou

b.

Suruga naru
Utsu no yamabe no
utsutsu ni mo

yume ni mo hito ni
awanu narikeri

c.

Toki shiranu
yama wa Fuji no ne
itsu tote ka
kanoko madara ni
yuki no fururan

d.

Na ni shi owaba
iza koto towan
miyakodori
waga omou hito wa
ari ya nashi ya to

10. The Call of the Wild Goose

a.

Miyoshino no
tanomu no kari mo
hitaburu ni
kimi ga kata ni zo
yoru to nakunaru

b.

Waga kata ni
yoru to naku naru
Miyoshino no
tanomu no kari o
itsu ka wasuren

11. The Revolving Moon

Wasuruna yo
hodo wa kumoi ni
narinu tomo
sora yuku tsuki no
meguri-au made

12. Grasses of the Musashi Plain

Musashino wa
kyō wa na yaki so
wakakusa no
tsuma mo komoreri
ware mo komoreri

13. Stirrups of Musashi

a.

Musashi abumi
sasuga ni kakete
tanomu ni wa
towanu mo tsurashi
tou mo urusashi

b.

Toeba iu
towaneba uramu
Musashi abumi
kakaruru ori ni ya
hito wa shinuran

14. Cocooning with Silkworms

a.

Nakanakani
koi ni shinazu wa
kuwako nizo
narubekarikeru
tama no o bakari

b.

Yo mo akeba
kitsu ni hamenade
kutakake no
madakini nakite
sena o yaritsuru

c.

Kurihara no
Aneha no matsu no
hito naraba
miyako no tsuto ni
iza to iwamashi o

15. A Pathway to the Heart

Shinobūyama
shinobite kayou
michi mogana
hito no kokoro no
oku mo mirubeku

16. Robes of a Heavenly Maiden

a.

Te o orite
aimishi koto o
kazoueba
tō to iitsutsu
yotsu wa henikeri

b.

Toshi dani mo
tō tote yotsu wa
henikeru o
ikutabi kimi o
tanomi kinuran

c.

Kore ya kono
ama no hagoromo
mubeshi koso
kimi ga mikeshi to
tatematsurikere

d.

Aki ya kuru
tsuyu ya magau to
omou made
aru wa namida no
furu ni zo arikeru

17. Fickle Blossoms

a.

Ada nari to
na ni koso tatere
sakurabana
toshi ni marenaru
hito mo machikeri

b.

Kyō kozu wa
asu wa yuki to zo
furinamashi
kiesu wa ari tomo
hana to mimashiya

18. From White to Red

a.

Kurenai ni
niou wa izura
shirayuki no
eda mo tōo ni
furu ka to mo miyu

b.

Kurenai ni
niou ga ue no
shiragiku wa
orikeru hito no
sode ka to mo miyu

19. A Raging Gale

a.

Amagumo no
yoso ni mo hito no
nari yuku ka
sasuga ni me ni wa
miyuru mono-kara

b.

Amagumo no
yoso ni nomi shite
furu koto wa
waga iru yama no
kaze hayami nari

20. No Such Thing as Spring

a.

Kimi ga tame
taoreru eda wa
haru nagara
kaku koso aki no
momiji shinikere

b.

Itsu no ma ni
utsurou iro no
tsukinuran
kimi ga sato ni wa
haru nakarurashi

21. Seeds of the Forgetting-Grass

a.

Idete inaba
kokoro karushi to
ii ya sen
yo no arisama o
hito wa shiraneba

b.

Omou kai
naki yo narikeri
toshitsuki o
ada ni chigirite
ware ya sumaishi

c.

Hito wa isa
omoi ya suran
tamakazura
omokage ni nomi
itodo mietsutsu

d.

Ima wa tote
wasururu kusa no
tane o dani
hito no kokoro ni
makasezu mogana

e.

Wasuregusa
uu to dani kiku
mono naraba
omoikeri to wa
shiri mo shinamashi

f.

Wasururan to
omou kokoro no
utagai ni
arishi yori keni
mono zo kanashiki

g.

Nakazora ni
tachi iru kumo no
ato mo naku

mi no hakanaku mo
narinikeru kana

22. A Thousand Nights

a.

Ukinagara
hito o ba e shimo
wasureneba
katsu uramitsutsu
nao zo koishiki

b.

Aimite wa
kokoro hitotsu o
kawashima no
mizu no nagarete
taeji to zo omou

c.

Aki no yo no
chiyo o hitoyo ni
nazuraete
yachiyo shi nebaya
aku toki no aran

d.

Aki no yo no
chiyo o hitoyo ni
naseri tomo
kotoba nokorite
tori ya nakinan

23. The Measuring Well

a.

Tsutsuitsu no
izutsu ni kakeshi
maro ga take
suginikerashi na
imo mizaru ma ni

b.

Kurabekoshi
furiwakegami mo
kata suginu
kimi narazu shite

tare ka agubeki

c.

Kaze fukeba
oki tsu shiranami
Tatsuta-yama
yowa ni ya kimi ga
hitori koyuran

d.

Kimi ga atari
mitsutsu o oran
Ikoma-yama
kumo na kakushi so
ame wa furutomo

e.

Kimi kon to
iishi yogoto ni
suginureba
tanomanu monono
koitsutsu zo furu

24. The Bow of the Crescent Moon

a.

Aratama no
toshi no mitose o
machi wabite
tada koyoi koso
niimakura sure

b.

Azusa-yumi
ma-yumi tsuki-yumi
toshi o hete
waga seshi ga goto
uruwashimi seyo

c.

Azusa-yumi
hikedo hikanedo
mukashi yori
kokoro wa kimi ni
yorinishi mono-o

d.

Ai omowade
karenuru hito o
todomekane
waga mi wa ima zo
kiehatenameru

25. The Sleeves of Morning

a.

Aki no no ni
sasa wakeshi asa no
sode yori mo
awade nuru yo zo
hichi masarikeru

b.

Mirume naki
waga mi o ura to
shiraneba ya
karenade ama no
ashi tayuku kuru

26. A Harbour in My Sleeves

Omōezu
sode ni minato no
sawagu kana
Morokoshi-bune no
yorishi bakari ni

27. Frogs in Pairs

a.

Ware bakari
mono omou hito wa
mata mo araji
to omoeba mizu no
shita ni mo arikeri

b.

Minakuchi ni
ware ya miyuran
kawazu sae
mizu no shita nite
morogoe ni naku

28. Cupped Hands

Nadote kaku
augo katami ni
nariniken
mizu morasaji to
musubishi mono-o

29. The Cherry Blossom Banquet

Hana ni akanu
nageki wa itsumo
seshikadomo
kyō no koyoi ni
niru toki wa nashi

30. A String of Threaded Gems

Au koto wa
tama no o bakari
omōete
tsuraki kokoro no
nagaku miyuran

31. Sir Clump of Grass

Tsumi mo naki
hito o ukeeba
wasuregusa
ono ga ue ni zo
ou to iunaru

32. A Spool of Love

Inishie no
shizu no odamaki
kuri-kaeshi
mukashi o ima ni
nasu yoshi mogana

33. Reed Ditty

a.
Ashibe yori
michikuru shio no
iyamashini
kimi ni kokoro o
omoi masu kana

b.
Komorie ni
omou kokoro o

ikade ka wa
fune sasu sao no
sashite shirubeki

34. Tempest

Ieba e ni
iwaneba mune ni
sawagarete
kokoro hitotsu ni
nageku koro kana

35. A Loosely Tied Knot

Tama no o o
awao ni yorite
musubereba
taete no nochi mo
awan to zo omou

36. A Hardy Vine

Tani sebami
mine made haeru
tamakazura
taen to hito ni
waga omowa-nakuni

37. Morning Glory

a.

Ware narade
shitahimo toku na
asagao no
yūkage matanu
hana ni wa ari tomo

b.

Futari shite
musubishi himo o
hitori shite
ai miru made wa
tokaji to zo omou

38. The Meaning of Love

a.

Kimi ni yori
omoi narainu
yo no naka no

hito wa kore o ya
koi to iuran

b.

Narawaneba
yo no hito-goto ni
nani o kamo
koi to wa iu to
toishi ware shimo

39. The Glow of Fireflies

a.

Idete inaba
kagiri narubemi
tomoshi kechi
toshi henuru ka to
naku koe o kike

b.

Ito aware
naku zo kikoyuru
tomoshi kechi
kiyuru mono tomo
ware wa shirazu na

40. With All His Heart

Idete inaba
tare ka wakare no
katakaran
arishi ni masaru
kyō wa kanashi mo

41. Purple Bonds

Murasaki no
iro koki toki wa
me mo haru ni
no naru kusaki zo
wakarezarikeru

42. Treading on My Footprints

Idete koshi
ato dani imada
kawaraji o
taga kayoiiji to
ima wa naruran

43. Where the Cuckoo Sings

a.

Hototogisu
na ga naku sato no
amata areba
nao utomarenu
omou mono-kara

b.

Na nomi tatsu
shide no taosa wa
kesa zo naku
iori amata to
utomarenureba

c.

Iori ōki
shide no taosa wa
nao tanomu
waga sumu sato ni
koe shi taezu wa

44. Undo a Train

Idete yuku
kimi ga tame ni to
nugitsureba
ware sae mo naku
narinubeki kana

45. Fireflies, Please Tell the Wild Geese

a.

Yuku hotaru
kumo no ue made
inubeku wa
akikaze fuku to
kari ni tsuge kose

b.

Kuregataki
natsu no higurashi
nagamureba
sono koto to naku
mono zo kanashiki

46. A Special Friend

Me karu tomo
omōe-nakuni
wasuraruru
toki shi nakereba
omokage ni tatsu

47. A Sacred Wand

a.

Ōnusa no
hiku te amata ni
narinureba
omoedo e koso
tanomazarikere

b.

Ōnusa to
na ni koso tatere
nagarete mo
tsui ni yoru se wa
ari to iu mono-o

48. The One Who Waits

Ima zo shiru
kurushiki mono to
hito matamu
sato oba karezu
tou bekarikeri

49. New Grass of Spring

a.

Urawakami
neyoge ni miyuru
wakakusa o
hito no musuban
koto oshi zo omou

b.

Hatsukusa no
nado mezurashiki
koto no ha zo
uranaku mono o
omoikeru kana

50. Lovers' Quarrel

a.

Tori no ko o
tō zutsu tō wa
kasanu tomo
omowanu hito o
omou mono-kawa

b.

Asatsuyu wa
kie-nokorite mo
arinubeshi
tare ka kono yo o
tanomi-hatsubeki

c.

Fuku kaze ni
kozo no sakura wa
chirazu tomo
ana tanomigata
hito no kokoro wa

d.

Yuku mizu ni
kazu kaku yori mo
hakanaki wa
omowanu hito o
omou narikeri

e.

Yuku mizu to
suguru yowai to
chiru hana to
izure mate chō
koto o kikuran

51. Deep Roots

Ueshi ueba
aki naki toki ya
sakazaran
hana koso chirame
ne sae kareme ya

52. Sweet Flags and Pheasants

Ayame kari
kimi wa numa nizo
madoikeru

ware wa no ni idete
karu zo wabishiki

53. Heart of the Night

Ikade kawa
tori no nakuran
hito shirezu
omou kokoro wa
mada yo fukaki ni

54. The Path of Dreams

Yuki-yaranu
yumeji o tanomu
tamoto ni wa
ama tsu sora naru
tsuyu ya okuran

55. The Things You Said

Omowazu wa
ari mo suramedo
koto no ha no
orifushi goto ni
tanomaruru kana

56. An Inn of Dew

Waga sode wa
kusa no iori ni
aranedomo
kureba tsuyu no
yadori narikeri

57. The Skeleton Shrimp

Koi wabinu
ama no karumo ni
yadoru chō
ware kara mi o mo
kudakitsuru kana

58. Demons and Gleanings

a.
Arenikeri
aware iku yo no
yado nare ya
sumiken hito no
otozure mo senu

b.
Mugura oite
aretaru yado no
uretaki wa
kari ni mo oni no
sudaku narikeri

c.
Uchiwabite
ochibo hirou to
kikamaseba
ware mo tazura ni
yukamashi mono-o

59. Crossing the Straits of the Milky Way

a.
Sumiwabinu
ima wa kagiri to
yamazato ni
mi o kakusubeki
yado motometen

b.
Waga ue ni
tsuyu zo okunaru
Amanogawa
to wataru fune no
kai no shizuku ka

60. Mandarin Blossom

Satsuki matsu
hana tachibana no
ka o kageba
mukashi no hito no
sode no ka zo suru

61. The Colour of Love

a.
Somegawa o
wataran hito no
ikade kawa
iro ni naru chō
koto no nakaran

b.

Na ni shi owaba
ada ni zo aru beki
Tawarejima
nami no nureginu
kuru to iu nari

62. Bare Branches

a.

Inishie no
nioi wa izura
sakurabana
kokeru kara tomo
narinikeru kana

b.

Kore ya kono
ware ni ō mi o
nogaretsutsu
toshitsuki furedo
masarigao naki

63. Love at a Hundred

a.

Momotose ni
hitotose taranu
tsukumogami
ware o kourashi
omokage ni miyu

b.

Samushiro ni
koromo katashiki
koyoi mo ya
koishiki hito ni
awade nomi nen

64. Becoming a Breeze

a.

Fuku kaze ni
waga mi o nasaba
tamasudare
hima motometsutsu
irubeki mono o

b.

Toritomenu
kaze ni wa ari tomo
tamasudare
ta ga yurusaba ka
hima motomubeki

65. The Young Love of Narihira

a.

Omou ni wa
shinoburu koto zo
makenikeru
au ni shi kaeba
samo araba are

b.

Koi seji to
mitarashigawa ni
seshi misogi
kami wa ukezu mo
narinikeru kana

c.

Ama no karu
mo ni sumu mushi no
warekara to
ne o koso nakame
yo o ba uramiji

d.

Saritomo to
omouran koso
kanashikere
aru nimo aranu
mi o shirazu shite

e.

Itazurani
yukite wa kinuru
mono yue ni
mimakuhoshisa ni
izanaware-tsutsu

66. The Sea of Life

Naniwazu o
kesa koso mitsu no

ura goto ni
kore ya kono yo o
umi wataru fune

67. Snow Blossom

Kinō kyō
kumo no tachimai
kakurou wa
hana no hayashi o
ushi to narikeri

68. The Place to Dwell

Kari nakite
kiku no hana saku
aki wa aredo
haru no umibe ni
Sumiyoshi no hama

69. Was It Real, or Just a Dream?

a.

Kimi ya koshi
ware ya yukiken
omōezu
yume ka utsutsu ka
nete ka samete ka

b.

Kaki-kurasu
kokoro no yami ni
madoiniki
yume utsutsu to wa
koyoi sadameyo

c.1

Kachibito no
wataredo nurenu
e ni shi areba ...

c.2

... mata Osaka no
seki wa koenan

70. Sea-Tangle

Mirume karu
kata ya izuko zo

sao sashite
ware ni oshieyo
ama no tsuribune

71. Traversing the Sacred Fence

a.

Chihayaburu
kami no igaki mo
koenubeshi
ōmiyabito no
mimakuhoshisa ni

b.

Koishiku wa
kite mo miyo kashi
chihayaburu
kami no isamuru
michi nara-nakuni

72. The Pine of Oyodo

Oyodo no
matsu wa tsuraku mo
ara-nakuni
uramite nomi mo
kaeru nami kana

73. Within the Moon

Me ni wa mite
te ni wa torarenu
tsuki no uchi no
katsura no gotoki
kimi ni zo arikeru

74. Piling up like Rocks

Iwane fumi
kasanaru yama ni
aranedomo
awanu hi ōku
koi wataru kana

75. ‘See-Weed, See-Shells’

a.

Oyodo no
hama ni ou chō
miru karani

kokoro wa naginu
katarawanedomo

b.

Sode nurete
ama no kari hosu
watatsu umi no
miru o au ni te
yaman to ya suru

c.

Iwama yori
ouru mirume shi
tsurenaku wa
shio hi shio michi
kai mo arinan

d.

Namida ni zo
nuretsutsu shiboru
yo no hito no
tsuraki kokoro wa
sode no shizuku ka

76. The Age of the Gods

Ohara ya
Oshio no yama mo
kyō koso wa
kamiyo no koto mo
omoi-izurame

77. The Parting of Spring

Yama no mina
utsurite kyō ni
au koto wa
haru no wakare o
tō to narubeshi

78. The Heart Has No Colours

Akanedomo
iwa ni zo kauru
iro mienu
kokoro o misen
yoshi no nakereba

79. The Shelter of Bamboo

Waga kado ni
chihiro aru kage o
uetsureba
natsu fuyu tare ka
kakurezarubeki

80. Wisteria Blossoms

Nuretsutsu zo
shiite oritsuru
toshi no uchi ni
haru wa ikuka mo
araji to omoeba

81. Sailing into a Garden

Shiogama ni
itsuka kiniken
asanagi ni
tsuri suru fune wa
koko ni yoranan

82. The Heart of Spring

a.

Yo no naka ni
taete sakura no
nakariseba
haru no kokoro wa
nodokekaramashi

b.

Chireba koso
itodo sakura wa
medetakere
uki yo ni nani ka
hisashikarubeki

c.

Kari-kurashi
tanabata-tsume ni
yado karan
ama no kawara ni
ware wa kinikeri

d.

Hitotose ni

hitotabi kimasu
kimi mateba
yado kasu hito mo
araji to zo omou

e.

Aka-nakuni
madakimo tsuki no
kakururu ka
yama no ha nigete
irezu mo aranan

f.

Oshinabete
mine mo taira ni
narinanan
yama no ha naku wa
tsuki mo iraji o

83. Toiling Through Snow

a.

Makura tote
kusa hiki-musubu
koto mo seji
aki no yo to dani
tanomare-nakuni

b.

Wasurete wa
yume ka to zo omou
omoiki ya
yuki fumiwakete
kimi o min to wa

84. A Son's Wish

a.

Oinureba
saranu wakare no
ari to ieba
iyoiyo mimaku
hoshiki kimi kana

b.

Yo no naka ni
saranu wakare no

naku mogana
chiyo mo to inoru
hito no ko no tame

85. My Heart's the Snow

Omoedomo
mi o shi wakeneba
me-kare senu
yuki no tsumoru zo
waga kokoro naru

86. Past Loves

Ima made ni
wasurenu hito wa
yo ni mo araji
ono ga samazama
toshi no henureba

87. Travels in Ashiya

a.

Ashi no ya no
Nada no shio-yaki
itoma nami
tsuge no ogushi mo
sasazu kinikeri

b.

Waga yo o ba
kyō ka asu ka to
matsu kai no
namida no taki to
izure takakemu

c.

Nuki-midaru
hito koso arurashi
shiratama no
ma naku mo chiru ka
sode no sebaki ni

d.

Haruru yo no
hoshi ka kawabe no
hotaru kamo

waga sumu kata no
ama no taku hi ka

e.

Watatsumi no
kazashi ni sasu to
iwau mo mo
kimi ga tame ni wa
oshimazarikeri

88. The Rounds of the Moon

Ōkata wa
tsuki o mo medeji
kore zo kono
tsumoreba hito no
oi to naru mono

89. Which God Would They Blame?

Hito shirezu
ware koi shinaba
ajikinaku
izure no kami ni
naki na ōsen

90. By Tomorrow ...

Sakurabana
kyō koso kaku mo
niou tomo
ana tanomigata
asu no yo no koto

91. The Last Day of Spring

Oshimedomo
haru no kagiri no
kyō no hi no
yūgure ni sae
narinikeru kana

92. Hidden by Reeds

Ashibe kogu
tananashi obune
ikuso tabi
yuki kaeruran
shiru hito mo nami

93. Love Between the Ranks

Ōna-ōna
omoi wa subeshi
nazoe naku
takaki iyashiki
kurushikarikeri

94. Autumn Leaves and Spring Blossoms

a.

Aki no yo wa
haruhi wasururu
mono nare ya
kasumi ni kiri ya
chie masaruran

b.

Chiji no aki
hitotsu no haru ni
mukawame ya
momiji mo hana mo
tomo ni koso chire

95. The Herd Boy's Star

Hikoboshi ni
koi wa masarinu
Ama-no-gawa
hedatsuru seki o
ima wa yamete yo

96. Boils and Curses

Aki kakete
iishi nagara mo
ara-nakuni
ko-no-ha furishiku
e ni koso arikere

97. Old Age, Don't Come!

Sakurabana
chiri-kai kumore
oiraku no
komu to iu naru
michi magau ga ni

98. Blooms of Devotion

Waga tanomu

kimi ga tame ni to
oru hana wa
toki shimo wakanu
mono ni zo arikeru

99. A Glimpse or Not

a.

Mizu mo arazu
mi mo senu hito no
koishiku wa
ayanaku kyō ya
nagame kurasan

b.

Shiru shiranu
nani ka ayanaku
wakite iwan
omoi nomi koso
shirube narikere

100. Longing-Grass

Wasuregusa
ouru nobe to wa
miruramedo
ko wa shinobu nari
nochi mo tanoman

101. Glorious Wisteria

Saku hana no
shita ni kakururu
hito o ōmi
arishi ni masaru
fuji no kage kamo

102. Riding Upon Clouds

Somuku tote
kumo ni wa noranu
mono naredo
yo no uki koto zo
yoso ni naru chō

103. A Fleeting Dream

Nenuru yo no
yume o hakanami
madoromeba

iya hakana ni mo
nari-masaru kana

104. 'See-Weed' and Winks, Not Winkles

Yo o umi no
ama to shi hito o
miru kara ni
mekuwaseyo tomo
tanomaruru kana

105. Mister Dewdrop

Shiratsuyu wa
kenaba kenanan
kiesu tote
tama ni nuku beki
hito mo araji o

106. Dyeing Itself Red

Chihayaburu
kamiyo mo kikazu
Tatsuta-gawa
karakurenai ni
mizu kukuru to wa

107. The Truth-Revealing Rain

a.

Tsurezure no
nagame ni masaru
namidagawa
sode nomi hichite
au yoshi mo nashi

b.

Asami koso
sode wa hitsurame
namidagawa
mi sae nagaru to
kikaba tanoman

c.

Kazūkazu ni
omoi omowazu
toigatami
mi o shiru ame wa
furi zo masareru

108. Crying Frogs

a.

Kaze fukeba
towa ni nami kosu
iwa nare ya
waga koromode no
kawaku toki naki

b.

Yoi goto ni
kawazu no amata
naku ta ni wa
mizu koso masare
ame wa furanedo

109. First Mourned

Hana yori mo
hito koso ada ni
narinikere
izure o saki ni
koin to ka mishi

110. Bind Me with a Spell

Omoi-amari
idenishi tama no
aru naran
yobukaku mieba
tamamusubi seyo

111. Coming Undone

a.

Inishie wa
ari mo ya shiken
ima zo shiru
mada minu hito o
kouru mono to wa

b.

Shitahimo no
shirushi to suru mo
toke-nakuni
kataru ga goto wa
koizu zo arubeki

c.

Koishi to wa
sara ni mo iwaji
shitahimo no
token o hito wa
sore to shiranan

112. Drifting Smoke

Suma no ama no
shio yaku keburu
kaze o itami
omowanu kata ni
tanabikinikeri

113. The Shortest Time

Nagakaranu
inochi no hodo ni
wasururu wa
ikani mijikaki
kokoro naruran

114. The Crane's Lament

Okina-sabi
hito na togame so
karigoromo
kyō bakari to zo
tazu mo nakunaru

115. Burned by Live Coals

Oki-no-ite
mi o yaku yori mo
kanashiki wa
Miyakoshima-be no
wakare narikeri

116. Eaves on Waves

Namima yori
miyuru kojima no
hamabisashi
hisashiku narinu
kimi ni ai mide

117. The Shrine of the Little Pine

a.
Ware mite mo
hisashiku narinu

Sumiyoshi no
kishi no hime-matsu
iku yo henuran

b.

Mutsumashi to
kimi wa shiranami
mizūgaki no
hisashiki yo yori
iwai someteki

118. Creeping Vine

Tamakazura
hau ki amata ni
narinureba
taenu kokoro no
ureshige mo nashi

119. Keepsake Enemies

Katami koso
ima wa ata nare
kore naku wa
wasururu toki mo
aramashi mono-o

120. Festival of Pots

Omi naru
Tsukuma no matsuri
toku senan
tsurenaki hito no
nabe no kazu min

121. Plum-Blossom Bonnet

a.

Uguisu no
hana o nuu chō
kasa mogana
nurumeru hito ni
kisete kaesan

b.

Uguisu no
hana o nuu chō
kasa wa ina
omoi o tsukeyo

hoshite kaesan

122. Waters of Promise

Yamashiro no
Ide no tamamizu
te ni musubi
tanomishi kai mo
naki yo narikeri

123. Becoming a Quail

a.

Toshi o hete
sumi koshi sato o
idete inaba
itodo Fukakusa
no to ya narinan

b.

No to naraba
uzura to narite
naki oran
kari ni dani ya wa
kimi wa kozaran

124. Not a Soul ...

Omou koto
iwade zo tada ni
yaminubeki
ware to hitoshiki
hito shi nakereba

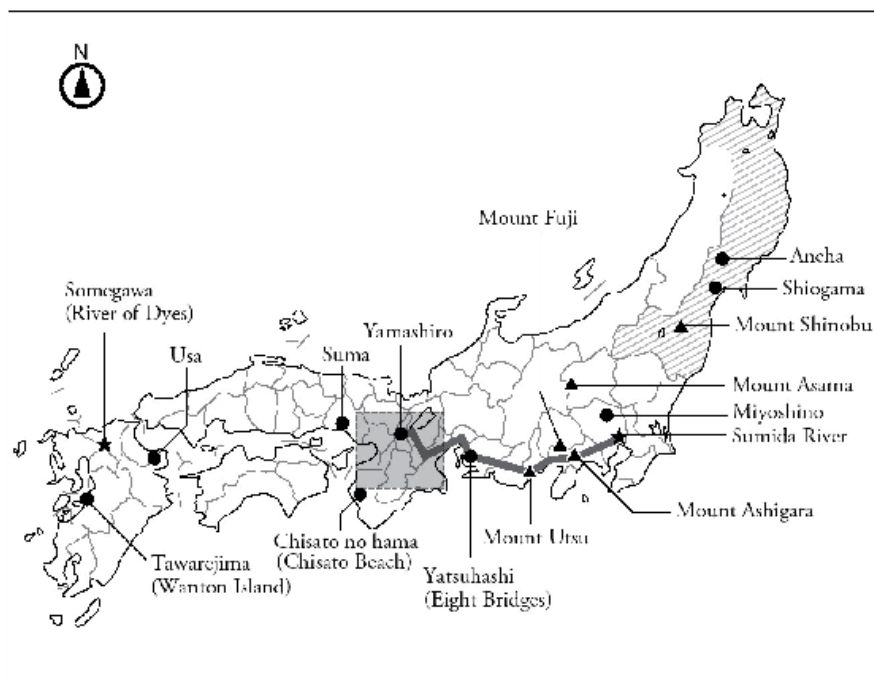
125. This Day

Tsui ni yuku
michi to wa kanete
kikishikado
kinō kyō to wa
omowazarishi o

Appendix 6

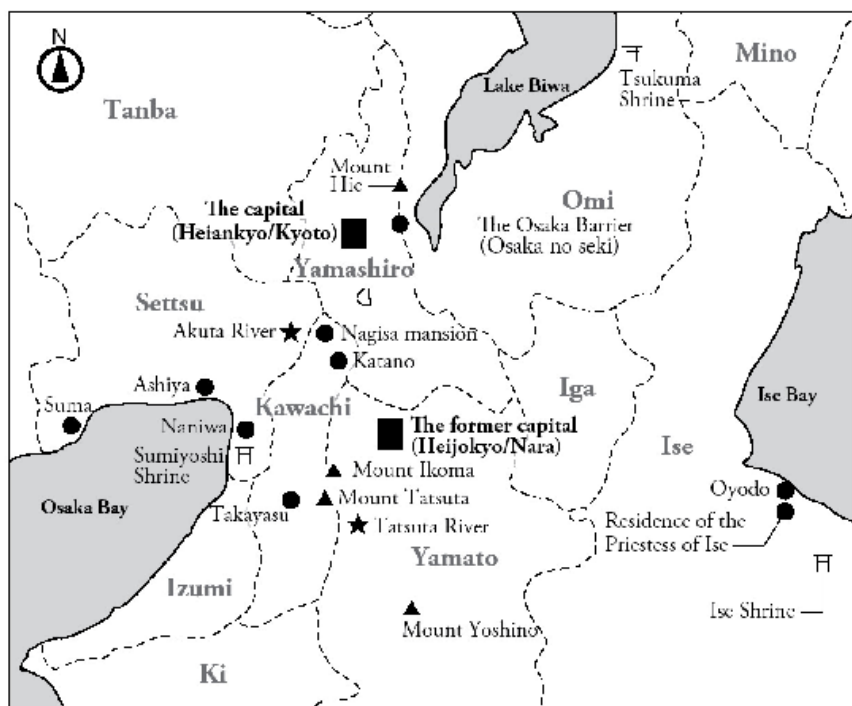
Maps

1. Administrative Districts of Japan in the Eighth to Ninth Centuries Showing Places that Appear in the Tales



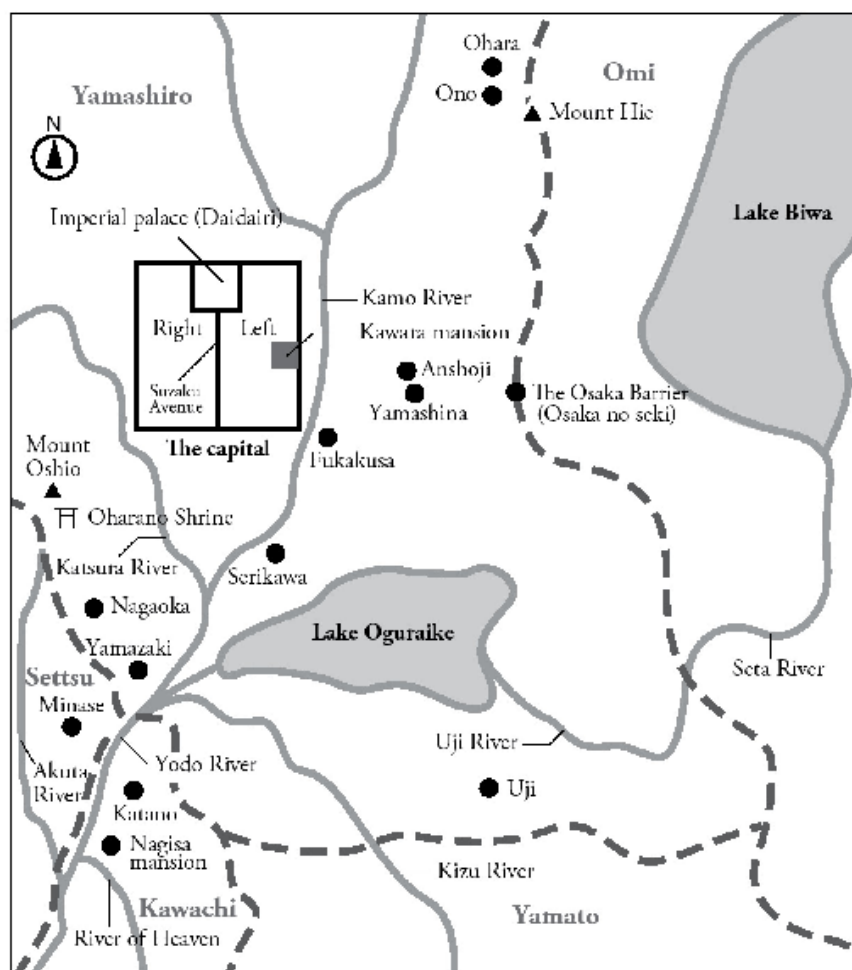
-  The capital (Heiankyo/Kyoto) and environs
-  Michinoku Province
-  Journey to the east (along the Tokaido/Eastern Sea Road)
-  Mountain
-  River
-  Place name

2. The Capital (Heiankyo/Kyoto) and Neighbouring Provinces



- ▲ Mountain
- ★ River
- Place name
- The capital
- ⌌ Shrine

3. The Capital (Heiankyo/Kyoto) and Environs



- ▲ Mountain
- Place name
- ▭ The capital
- ▭ Shrine

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Tawaraya Sotatsu, Early Edo Period, Collection of Yamato Bunkakan

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